

***Opening Statement made by the representative of European Inland Fisheries
Advisory Commission (EIFAC)***

It gives me great pleasure to attend this meeting of NASCO as an observer from the European Inland Fisheries Advisory Commission.

For those that might be unaware, EIFAC is a body of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Established in 1957, it is an inter-governmental forum for collaboration and information exchange on inland fisheries and aquaculture among all European countries. Organizations, institutions and agencies that are involved in managing inland fisheries occasionally need to seek guidance, and EIFAC serves as a network, linking policy-makers, managers, scientists and others working on inland fisheries and aquaculture issues. The scientific work is undertaken in Working Parties by specialists from member countries.

An awareness of European fisheries initiatives and some degree of international consistency in the resolution of fisheries management issues are of increasing importance at the present time. The profile of the pressures on ecosystems and the services that humanity obtains from them is being raised by considerations of Water Framework Directive, climate change and over-fishing, to name but a few. Promoting best practice to the inland fisheries sector and its stakeholders is where EIFAC can help.

If EIFAC is to fulfil its role, and is to function effectively, keeping up to date with all aspects of inland fisheries is vital. Many recreational fisheries are dependent upon the sustainable exploitation of salmon and it is important to safeguard the enduring social, economic and conservation values of such fisheries. It is, therefore, very much appreciated that NASCO extended to EIFAC the invitation to observe this meeting.

I wish you all a productive meeting.

Thank you!

Opening Statement made by Non-Government Organizations

Mr President, Colleagues

I am pleased to present the joint opening statement on behalf of the NGO Group. We're delighted to be here in Gijon, not least because this Region of Asturias hosted one of the key working meetings early in the Next Steps process, so some of us are familiar with your excellent organisational skills and hospitality.

The Next Steps process has now been underway for two years, and already NASCO can claim to be the most open and transparent intergovernmental treaty organisation. This year, for example, NGOs have played a full part in the review of Implementation Plans and Focus Area Reports, as well as participating in workshops on *Gyrodactylus* and the socio-economic impacts of salmon management.

We note the comments from the EU to couple a performance review with the review of the Next Steps process; as mere observers we noted the huge amounts of time the debate on that subject wasted last year, when we could have been dealing with more productive topics aimed at conserving Atlantic salmon; the Next Steps process should be completed and, as a comprehensive review process itself, assessed in detail before any additional performance review is undertaken

The production of Implementation Plans was a first key step in making Parties publicly accountable for their salmon management plans, and we would like to applaud the positive way that individual jurisdictions have responded to our constructive criticism by making significant revisions and improvements. We now look forward to drilling down, via the Focus Area Reports on fisheries management, into the detail of those plans. Atlantic salmon stocks remain at historically low levels and ICES have once again highlighted the danger posed by mixed stock fisheries, yet we note from their report that 38% of the catch in the NEAC Region is of coastal origin. Despite considerable progress in reducing such fisheries in recent years, the fact that more than a third of the catch in home waters still comes from mixed stock fisheries is not acceptable, and we will be drawing attention to particular culprits later in the meeting.

Here, towards the southern limits of the salmon's range, it is regrettable that our hosts and their Iberian neighbours, have not yet been able to complete national Implementation Plans of their own. While we appreciate some of the difficulties, it is in precisely these areas where salmon struggle to survive, that application of NASCO agreements and guidelines can greatly assist in the conservation of the species.

We would also like to acknowledge the launch of the SALSEA-Merge programme, and all those who have supported and in particular, funded it: the EU 7th Framework Programme, Atlantic Salmon Trust, Atlantic Salmon Federation, FondationTotal, and of course the Parties, especially the recent contribution by Canada. This has been a tremendous team effort, with more than 20 contracting organisations now involved in a public-private partnership, ably led by our President.

One area we will be returning to where we think there is continuing room for improvement is media relations. NGOs from both sides of the Atlantic played a full part in the PR Group meetings held in December 2006, and some progress has been made since then, but on an intermittent basis. We will be calling for better planning and a more consistent approach in future.

Another area of concern is our relationship with the International Fish Farming Community. Last year, NASCO suggested a Task Force approach to target areas of concern and clarify the threat and impacts on wild salmon. The ISFA have responded with a proposal to re-instate full Liaison Group meetings which will simply maintain the status quo; we believe this is a backward step and should be rejected.

Mr President, in looking forward to the coming week, I want to finish by remarking that during the annual meeting, we naturally tend to concentrate on the organisational processes of NASCO; it's most important we remember the basic objectives of this organisation, so that when we go home we can focus our efforts and translate the Next Steps process into practical outcomes that fulfil the primary aim we all share: the conservation of wild Atlantic salmon.