

Opening Statement made by the President of NASCO

A cháirde uilligh, fáilte roibh go leir chuig on fiche is a cuigiú crinniu don Aontas an Atlantaigh Thuaidh um Chaomhnu an Bhradain. Mr Curcio, Mr Garcia-Gaona, Deputy Mayor, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to NASCO's Twenty-Fifth Annual Meeting here in this beautiful coastal area of Asturias.

It is indeed a great pleasure to celebrate NASCO's silver jubilee in northern Spain, with its lush and green countryside and rugged coastline, framed by the Picos de Europa and home to some of the world's most beautiful Atlantic salmon rivers. The Secretary and I were in Oviedo several years ago to speak at one of the first major scientific meetings on Spanish salmon stocks and I look forward, with great anticipation, to revisiting later this week some of the most beautiful nursery and spawning areas I have yet encountered. The water in the upper reaches of these fine rivers is as clear as a Slovenian trout stream but as majestic in character as the Royal Dee in Scotland. During my previous visit I was fascinated to learn that the coast running from the French border in the east to the Portuguese border in the south, through the Provinces of Asturias and Galicia, at one time boasted over 50 of Europe's finest Atlantic salmon rivers. Not alone were many of these substantial rivers in their own right but their productivity was immense. This area of Cantabria has been home to man for at least some 15,000 years and during that time the salmon was in turn a major source of both nutrition and commerce, to those living in these beautiful valleys. We are told by the historians that the prehistoric Iberians and Celts, the Phoenicians and Greeks who followed them, barley exploited the rich fisheries of the area but the Romans used the riches of the rivers more extensively. Indeed it is said that it was a Roman general who commented that: "... while in Spain a man will abandon his work, his cattle and even his woman for an opportunity to catch a salmon"!

This year's meeting will bring to fruition several major NASCO initiatives including presentations on the first Focus Area Reports on Management of Salmon Fisheries. This time last year we were busy reviewing the structure and format of the Implementation Plans. May I congratulate all concerned on the positive and professional manner in which parties responded to last year's review of the draft plans and the determined effort that was made to improve on the original formats, in order to ensure that the structure of such plans met the agreed criteria. I was particularly pleased to note that countries such as France and Germany provided detailed Implementation Plans which hopefully will ensure even greater prioritisation of salmon conservation and management throughout mainland Europe. I should also like to thank the two Ad Hoc Groups who meticulously reviewed the various Implementation Plans and the Focus Area Reports for us. Your reports have laid the basis for what I trust will be a very interesting and lively debate during this afternoon's special session.

This, our 25th anniversary, also marks the formal launch of the long awaited SALSEA Merge programme and the initiation of the two sister programmes in North America and Greenland. What was only a pipe dream four or five years ago is now a reality and we must now redouble our efforts to ensure that the ambitious targets we have set ourselves are met in full. During the course of our meeting you will be briefed on the research programmes and the results so far but I would like at this point in our meeting to acknowledge the large number of individuals who have worked tirelessly to ensure that our SALSEA vision became a reality.

Ladies and gentlemen we have before us an extensive agenda and three very full days of intensive discussion and debate. I trust we will be in position to make full use of the brief time we have available to us and that you will have an opportunity to contribute fully to the various debates. The *Next Steps for NASCO Process* was agreed in order to ensure that all of our partners played a full and active role in the work of NASCO and this afternoon's Special Session provides just such an opportunity.

Thank you.