

Opening Statement made by the President of NASCO

Distinguished Delegates, Observers, Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to thank Dr Jeub for his warm welcome and our German hosts for the excellent arrangements made for this the Thirty-Third Annual Meeting of NASCO.

It is a great pleasure to add my welcome to you all and to be here with you in the beautiful town of Bad Neuenahr-Ahrweiler in Rheinland-Pfalz. We are meeting in the catchment of the mighty River Rhine, a vital artery for the communities and industries that utilise its waters and an important link between northern and southern Europe since Roman times. Once a hugely productive salmon river, severe industrial pollution and the creation of barriers to migration resulted in the loss of salmon from the river in the 1950s.

However, we should not dwell on past environmental failings but rather celebrate the commitment and dedication that are being devoted to restoring salmon to this most international of rivers; indeed the salmon was adopted as a symbol of the river's recovery. We will hear more about the important work being undertaken to restore salmon in the Rhine and other rivers in Germany later on.

We have much to occupy us over the next four days. Our programme includes a Theme-based Special Session to review progress in addressing the impacts of salmon farming on the wild stocks. The purpose of these sessions is to allow for a more detailed exchange of information on a topic related to one of NASCO's agreements and consideration of best practice. I will have more to say at the start of the session tomorrow.

In addition there will be a Special Session on the evaluation of progress on the important actions contained in the Implementation Plans. We are now about half way through the second reporting cycle and our Review Group has taken a close look at progress to date. We will also be considering a proposal to hold an International Year of the Salmon with our colleagues in the North Pacific. This surely could be opportunity to raise awareness of the challenges and uncertainties facing salmon as well highlighting how to improve understanding of the factors driving abundance. We also consider a new stock classification system for use with our rivers database, an important outreach tool that we intend to use to develop a State of the Salmon report.

Continuing poor, and in some areas critically low, salmon abundance mean that effective action is vital both domestically and internationally. We will need to critically review our efforts, focusing on all known impact factors, if we are to conserve and restore the wild Atlantic salmon as the Convention requires of us. The need for international cooperation and exchange of information has probably never been more vital.

We will surely need to work efficiently in the time available to us, so it is good to know that we can benefit from an excellent spirit of cooperation and a wide-range of experience and expertise. And of course our highly effective Secretariat will, as always, support us well.

With that, I would like to move on noting that, although there will be no verbal statements by Parties and observers, written statements provided to the Secretariat will be distributed and annexed to our report.

Thank you for your attention.