

Welcoming Address made by Dr German Jeub, Director General for EU Policy, International Cooperation and Fisheries in the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture at the Thirty-Third Annual Meeting of NASCO

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you today for the 33rd Annual Meeting of the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization (NASCO) in Bad Neuenahr-Ahrweiler, one of Germany's most popular wine and spa towns that is known throughout the world for the Apollinaris Mineral Water spring. Federal Minister Christian Schmidt has asked me to pass on to you his very best regards. He wishes you every success and the best of luck for this year's meeting.

At this point, I would like to express my particular thanks to Mr Steinar Hermansen, the President of NASCO, for having accepted our invitation to hold the event in Germany and for giving us, for the first time, the opportunity, by acting as host, to be able to support NASCO in its important work to preserve this fantastic fish species – Atlantic salmon.

NASCO's Annual Meeting is a good opportunity for all stakeholders to draw the attention of the German public both to the major international efforts to protect salmon and to the successful national measures to re-introduce salmon in order to raise people's awareness.

You will surely have noticed that your conference hotel is located right on the bank of the river Ahr. The Ahr is a tributary of the Rhine and once harboured an excellent salmon population. What was probably the last Ahr salmon was spotted in 1960 below the estuary of the Ahr where it flows into the Rhine. Afterwards, the Ahr river's original salmon population was irretrievably extinct.

All salmon stocks in Germany suffered the same fate, unfortunately, not only in the Rhine catchment area but also key salmon stocks of the Elbe and Weser, for example. The extinction of original salmon populations means more than just one fish species having vanished. The disappearance of salmon deprived those who lived on the banks of the rivers of important fisheries that had shaped their economy and culture over many centuries.

There were some committed citizens, however, who did not want to resign themselves to this deplorable situation. Thus, at the end of the 1970s, initial attempts at a re-settlement of salmon in Germany were made in tributaries of the Lower Elbe. As the water quality generally improved in many rivers, more and more idealists followed suit throughout Germany. Today, we have re-settlement projects for salmon in all major river catchment areas that are mostly implemented in co-operation with fishing associations and fisheries and nature conservation authorities.

Over the past two to three decades, we had to learn that salmon re-settlement is a very difficult and lengthy undertaking. This is compounded by the fact that the native parent stock of this fish species, that is particularly closely adapted to the environmental conditions of its home rivers, is no longer available for re-settlement purposes. Major work is therefore still needed in order to re-establish self-sustaining salmon stocks in Germany.

Most of the work to re-settle salmon in Germany is done in the federal states, with fishermen's and anglers' associations in particular being the most active protagonists in returning salmon. In the Rhine catchment area, the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine is doing excellent work in co-ordinating individual initiatives.

During the excursions which we have organised along the Ahr and Sieg on Friday and Saturday, you will have the opportunity to get to know, on the ground, two examples of successful salmon re-introduction projects in the Rhine catchment area.

Tonight, I will have the pleasure to invite you, on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture, which is also competent for fisheries policy within the Federal Government, to a reception in the Roman villa - one of the main attractions of Bad Neuenahr-Ahrweiler.

Tomorrow evening we would then be delighted to welcome you to a joint dinner here at the Steigenberger Hotel.

I wish you every success for your Annual Meeting here in Bad Neuenahr-Ahrweiler and hope that you will have good and productive talks and discussions and, above all, that you will have some spare time to enjoy the beautiful scenery of the Ahr valley with its vineyards and exceptional rock formations.

You are most welcome as our guests.

Thank you for your attention.