

Agenda item 6.9
For decision

Council

CNL(05)25

***Progress Report and Future Actions in Relation to Application of the
Precautionary Approach***

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Progress Report and Future Actions in Relation to Application of the Precautionary Approach

Introduction

1. Under the Council's Action Plan for Application of the Precautionary Approach adopted in 1999 the following areas for application of the Precautionary Approach are identified:
 - management of North Atlantic salmon fisheries;
 - scientific advice and research requirements;
 - habitat protection and restoration;
 - aquaculture, introductions and transfers and transgenics;
 - unreported catches;
 - by-catch;
 - stock rebuilding programmes;
 - socio-economic issues.
2. During the five years since the Action Plan was adopted rapid progress has been made in developing guidelines for applying the Precautionary Approach to the Organization's work. A brief summary of this progress is presented below.

Actions to Date

Management of North Atlantic salmon fisheries

3. Following evaluation of, and revision to, an earlier document in the light of the Parties' experiences in its application in 2002 the Council adopted, a 'Decision Structure to Aid the Council and Commissions of NASCO and the Relevant Authorities in Implementing the Precautionary Approach to Management of North Atlantic Salmon Fisheries'. Reporting to the Council on progress in implementing the Decision Structure commenced in 2003. It was recognized that the Decision Structure was being used both to provide a record of decisions taken and to provide guidance to managers on how to reach management decisions. The Council agreed a new format for reporting on the use of the Decision Structure and this was used for the first time for the 2004 returns and has again been used for the 2005 returns which are presented in CNL(05)16.

Scientific advice and research requirements

4. The Standing Committee on the Precautionary Approach (SCPA) had noted that it is not for NASCO's scientific advisors to take on the role of implementing the Precautionary Approach but rather it is their role to advise on: the status of stocks; appropriate biological reference points needed to meet management objectives; the effectiveness of management regimes and the potential impacts and effectiveness of proposed management measures; areas of uncertainty and how they might be reduced; and the research required in support of the Precautionary Approach. NASCO's requests to ICES for scientific advice have been formulated to reflect these needs.

Habitat protection and restoration

5. At its 2001 Annual Meeting the Council adopted a 'Plan of Action for the Application of the Precautionary Approach to the Protection and Restoration of Atlantic Salmon Habitat'. In 2002 a Special Session was held, with reports by the Parties on the steps being taken to develop and implement habitat protection and restoration plans. In 2002, a reporting format was developed for the annual returns by the Parties on progress in developing and implementing habitat plans. The Council agreed this reporting format for use by the Parties for subsequent annual returns. The returns for 2005 will be presented, CNL(05)17.
6. To measure progress in meeting the objective of the Plan of Action the Contracting Parties and their relevant jurisdictions agreed to establish inventories of salmon rivers. The SCPA had previously asked the Council to decide if a central database should be established to hold the information in the inventories developed by the Parties. Last year the Council was advised that an expanded database based on the detailed inventory structure outlined in the Plan of Action had been developed by US scientists and made available through a website, www.WildAtlanticSalmon.com. The Council agreed on the potential uses of the salmon rivers database and agreed on the next steps in its development. The Council agreed that NASCO should assume responsibility for maintaining and further developing the database. A report on progress is presented in document CNL(05)18. The intention is that the database will be transferred to NASCO after the Twenty-Second Annual Meeting.

Aquaculture, introductions and transfers and transgenics

7. In 2003 the Council adopted the 'Resolution by the Parties to the Convention for the Conservation of Salmon in the North Atlantic Ocean to Minimise Impacts from Aquaculture, Introductions and Transfers and Transgenics on the Wild Salmon Stocks,' the 'Williamsburg Resolution'. This Resolution restructured NASCO's existing agreements into one new 'umbrella' Resolution amended so as to include elements on burden of proof, risk assessment, mitigation and corrective measures, implementation and reporting. A new annex with guidelines on stocking had also been added. It was recognized that the Resolution is a 'living document' that will evolve in the light of experience with its implementation, consultations, improved scientific understanding of the impacts on the wild stocks and developments in measures to minimize them. At this year's Liaison Group meeting with the North Atlantic salmon farming industry, the industry representatives agreed to provide specific comments on the Williamsburg Resolution to the Council. Any such specific comments received will be presented at the Twenty-Second Annual Meeting. Last year the Council adopted a new definition of 'transgenic' and agreed revised Guidelines for Action on Transgenic Salmonids and Guidelines for Stocking Atlantic Salmon. A new reporting format was developed in relation to the Williamsburg Resolution and was used for the 2004 and 2005 returns. The latter are presented in document CNL(05)20.

Unreported catches

8. The Council has developed a format for annual reporting of information on unreported catches in a transparent manner and has encouraged the introduction of

measures to minimize unreported catches. Such actions are consistent with the Precautionary Approach. The returns for 2005 will be presented, CNL(05)22.

By-catch

9. The Council has previously expressed concern about the level of by-catch of post-smolt Atlantic salmon in fisheries for pelagic species of fish, particularly mackerel, in the North-East Atlantic. The need to further improve these estimates of by-catch was recognized and the Council had recommended to the International Atlantic Salmon Research Board that research proposals to assess by-catch should be afforded a high priority. In 2003, consistent with the Precautionary Approach, the Council agreed that it would: encourage and seek appropriate funding for research *inter alia* on the distribution of salmon at sea and on by-catch in pelagic fisheries; encourage pilot studies on technical adjustments to the deployment of gear in pelagic fisheries so as to minimize by-catch; review the results of this research at its 2005 Annual Meeting; continue to ask ICES to provide information on by-catch; and request, if appropriate in the light of these findings, the Parties, non-Parties and fisheries Commissions to make adjustments to fishing methods so as to minimize by-catch of salmon. The Council considered that these actions would constitute adoption of the Precautionary Approach to by-catch. At the Twenty-Second Annual Meeting, the Parties will be asked to report on any of the research referred to above that has been undertaken in relation to by-catch.

Stock rebuilding programmes

10. A stock rebuilding programme has been defined by the Council as an array of management measures, including habitat improvement, exploitation control and stocking, designed to restore a stock above its conservation limit. These management measures are being addressed by the Council in application of the Precautionary Approach. However, the Council agreed that it would be useful to develop guidelines for stock rebuilding programmes and at its 2004 Annual Meeting Guidelines on the Use of Stock Rebuilding Programmes in the context of the Precautionary Management of Salmon Stocks were adopted. A reporting format was agreed and the first returns using this format will be presented, CNL(05)23.

Social-economic issues

11. The wild Atlantic salmon has many aspects to its value, including those associated with the fisheries. In addition, however, there are values associated with the existence of the salmon. These values are difficult to assess but so widespread that they may greatly exceed the values associated with the fisheries. In 2003 a NASCO Technical Workshop explored all of these values and developed a template for assessing the social and economic values of the wild Atlantic salmon. Last year the Council adopted Guidelines for Incorporating Social and Economic Factors in Decisions under the Precautionary Approach, CNL(04)57. The Parties agreed to report to the Council on an example of the use of the guidelines in relation to one area of the application of the Precautionary Approach, and the returns will be presented, CNL(05)24. The Council also decided to set up a small Working Group, led by the US, to develop bio-economic modeling approaches that would allow social and economic factors to be integrated into a management model for Atlantic salmon. This Working Group has not yet met but it is anticipated that a meeting will be held during 2005.

Future Actions

12. As noted by the President at the Twentieth Annual Meeting, NASCO has made great strides in developing its thinking on application of the Precautionary Approach, to the extent that NASCO is perceived as being at the forefront of the fishery Commissions in applying the Precautionary Approach to its work. This progress has been achieved through excellent cooperation by all the Parties. After six years of sustained activity in developing NASCO's agreements on the Precautionary Approach we might now anticipate a period of consolidation where the emphasis will be on implementation and detailed and transparent reporting under the various agreements.
13. This reporting serves not only to demonstrate the Parties' commitment to the agreements but also to exchange information on best practice. It is clear from the stakeholder consultation meetings that while NASCO is considered to have developed useful agreements, there is a perceived need for further progress in their implementation and on reporting the measures taken. The 'Next Steps for NASCO' Working Group has developed recommendations in relation to commitments by the Parties, meeting structure and reporting (see CNL(05)14) which will be considered by the Council under agenda item 5. The Council might also wish to consider if there is a need to review all of its agreements with regard to consistency of approach.
14. Finally, one issue not addressed in the original Action Plan, but which has been raised at previous meetings and at the stakeholder consultation meetings, is how predator-related mortality of salmon should be handled under a Precautionary Approach. A report on possible approaches for NASCO in relation to this issue is presented separately, CNL(05)26.

Secretary
Edinburgh
11 May, 2005