

Council

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Strategic Approach for NASCO's 'Next Steps'

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The NASCO Vision

The North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization (NASCO) has made great progress in the past 20 years, but the Organization's objectives and achievements could be more strategically organised and presented, which would enhance NASCO's ability to achieve its mandate as well as improve communication with NGOs, stakeholders and the public. The following 'vision' for NASCO clearly demonstrates its overall goal along with the key approaches that will be adopted in working to achieve it.

NASCO will pursue the restoration of abundant Atlantic salmon stocks throughout the species' range with the aim of providing the greatest possible benefits to society and individuals.

To achieve this vision, NASCO will:

- *be committed to the measures and agreements it develops and actively review progress with implementation plans;*
- *increase its effectiveness and efficiency by ensuring that it uses the best available knowledge to inform its actions and by actively seeking to identify and respond to new opportunities and threats;*
- *ensure transparency in its operations and enhance the use of NGO and stakeholder knowledge and experience;*
- *increase its visibility and raise its profile in international, national and local communities by developing its communications and public relations activities.*

The Strategic Approach

NASCO's work over the past 20 years provides a strong foundation for the development of a strategic approach to the future work of the Organization. Key elements of this foundation, which support the Vision Statement, are outlined below.

NASCO is an international, inter-governmental treaty Organization charged with contributing through international consultation and co-operation to the conservation, restoration, enhancement and rational management of salmon stocks in the North Atlantic Ocean, taking into account the best available scientific advice.

NASCO and its Parties have embraced the Precautionary Approach in the management of salmon stocks and are committed to basing management decisions on the best available scientific information, taking account of its uncertainties. They have also adopted an Ecosystem-based Approach, recognising the complex interaction of many activities that

affect salmon stocks as well as the effects of salmon management upon other activities. NASCO has based its management activities on these approaches.

NASCO is well positioned to identify and respond effectively to threats to the salmon resource and to seize new conservation opportunities. It will continue to identify these issues and prioritise activities to address them.

NASCO has a unique role to play in complementing and enhancing the efforts of its Parties. It is well placed to provide a forum for sharing information on the status of stocks and the challenges facing salmon management and for developing and disseminating best practice.

NASCO wishes to demonstrate that its agreements are implemented by the Parties in a timely manner, and that reporting to the Council is comprehensive, transparent and conducted in a challenging environment.

NASCO has responsibilities for developing management measures for mixed-stock fisheries in Faroese and Greenlandic waters, but it recognises the need to review the balance and fairness between management of distant-water and homewater fisheries. There is a need to share information on management measures to ensure that they are equitable.

NASCO and its Parties need to collect and share information on salmon stocks, particularly in areas where information is currently sparse.

NASCO's NGOs, along with other stakeholders in the salmon resource, hold a wealth of knowledge and experience which is highly relevant to NASCO's aims and objectives and can contribute to improve NASCO's work and effectiveness. NASCO will therefore continue to engage with these groups as fully as possible, in order to make best use of this information. It is essential that these links are developed appropriately given NASCO's status as an inter-governmental body.

Public and political support are essential elements of effective salmon conservation, and NASCO must make full use of opportunities to develop external relations.

Challenges

The challenges facing NASCO in the management and conservation of wild Atlantic salmon and ways to address these challenges have been identified, specifically highlighting areas which would benefit from international cooperation and collaboration. The primary challenges are:

- Managing salmon fisheries;
- Social and economic aspects of Atlantic salmon;
- Research on salmon at sea (including studies of by-catch of salmon);
- Habitat protection and restoration;
- Aquaculture, introductions and transfers and transgenics (highlighting *Gyrodactylus salaris*);
- Initiatives for endangered populations.

Each of these challenges is described below. Suggesting these as challenges does not imply other areas are not important, but recognises that there is a need to prioritise given resource and personnel constraints.

Management of salmon fisheries

The goals for the management of salmon fisheries for NASCO and its Parties are to promote the diversity and abundance of salmon stocks and to maintain all stocks above their conservation limits (reference Action Plan for Application of the Precautionary Approach, CNL(99)48).

The key issues in relation to the management of salmon fisheries are to:

- maintain an effective prohibition on fishing for salmon beyond areas of fisheries jurisdiction;
- further improve the 'fairness' and balance in management of distant-water fisheries;
- explore possibilities for longer-term regulatory measures;
- exchange information and transfer expertise and knowledge between Parties and between NGOs and the authorities;
- further develop the knowledge basis for fisheries regulations.

Social and economic aspects of the Atlantic salmon

The goal for NASCO and its Parties on the social and economic aspects of the Atlantic salmon is to ensure that the salmon stocks provide the greatest possible benefits to society and individuals.

The key issues in relation to the social and economic aspects of the Atlantic salmon are to:

- ensure that appropriate emphasis is given to the social and economic aspects of the Atlantic salmon;
- strengthen the socio-economic data as a basis for managing Atlantic salmon;
- integrate social and economic aspects and considerations in an open and transparent way into the decision-making processes within NASCO;
- disseminate information on the social and economic aspects of the wild Atlantic salmon in order to ensure that they are given due weight compared to other important commercial and public interests.

Research on salmon at sea (including studies of by-catch of salmon)

The goal for NASCO and its Parties is to promote collaboration and cooperation on research into the causes of marine mortality of Atlantic salmon and the opportunities to counteract this mortality.

The key issues in relation to research on salmon at sea are to:

- develop an effective fund-raising strategy and identify and target potential sponsors;
- strengthen NGO involvement in, and support for, the Board and for its fund-raising activities.

Protection and restoration of Atlantic salmon habitat

The goal for NASCO and its Parties is to maintain and, where possible, increase the current productive capacity of Atlantic salmon habitat.

The key issues in relation to habitat protection and restoration are to:

- ensure effective implementation of NASCO's Plan of Action for Habitat Protection and Restoration, CNL(01)51;
- enhance sharing and exchange of information on habitat issues and best management practices between NASCO Parties and other relevant international bodies (i.e. International Baltic Sea Fishery Commission (IBSFC), North Pacific Anadromous Fish Commission (NPAFC), Pacific Salmon Commission (PSC));
- maintain the NASCO salmon rivers database.

Aquaculture, introductions and transfers and transgenics

The goal for NASCO and its Parties is to minimise the possible adverse impacts of aquaculture, introductions and transfers and transgenics on the wild stocks of Atlantic salmon, including working with industry stakeholders, where appropriate.

The key issues in relation to aquaculture, introduction and transfers and transgenics are to:

- determine the need for internationally agreed regulations or standards for aquaculture, introductions and transfers and transgenics;
- enhance public awareness of developments concerning aquaculture, introductions and transfers and transgenics;
- minimise the escape of farmed salmon to a level that is as close as practicable to zero;
- minimise any negative impacts of ranched salmon by utilizing, as far as possible, local stocks and developing and applying appropriate release and harvest strategies;
- minimise the adverse genetic and other biological interactions from salmon enhancement activities, including introductions and transfers;
- minimise the risk of transmission to wild salmon stocks of diseases and parasites from all aquaculture activities and from introductions and transfers;
- consider the consequences of aquaculture of Atlantic salmon in countries that are not parties to NASCO.

Gyrodactylus salaris

The goal for NASCO and its Parties is to prevent the further spread of this parasite and to eradicate it from infected areas, working with stakeholders, where appropriate.

The key issues in relation to *G. salaris* are to:

- minimise the threat posed by *G. salaris* to Atlantic salmon;
- enhance cooperation on monitoring, research and dissemination of information regarding *G. salaris*, with special regard to the lack of knowledge on distribution and ecology of the parasite;

- strengthen international, national and regional legislation and guidelines to prevent the further spread of *G. salaris*.

Initiatives for endangered salmon populations

The goal for NASCO and its Parties is to cooperate internationally to protect and rebuild threatened and endangered salmon populations in order to preserve natural diversity.

The key issues in relation to endangered salmon populations are to:

- develop a common terminology to describe the level of threat (i.e. endangered, threatened, near-threatened, vulnerable);
- choose the appropriate strategy, management actions and conservation approaches;
- facilitate a regular exchange of know-how in this field;
- identify efficient stock monitoring techniques to measure success.

Decisions of the NASCO Council

The Council wishes to move quickly to implement the recommendations from the 'Next Steps for NASCO' Working Group and contained in Annex 5 of document CNL(05)14. It recognises that some of these recommendations can be immediately implemented whilst other recommendations require additional consideration prior to their implementation. Whilst the Council welcomes the full report from the 'Next Steps for NASCO' Working Group (CNL(05)14), there is a need to prioritise implementation so that the proper attention and focus can be placed on issues and account can be taken of resource limitations, both human and financial.

1. General Decisions for Immediate Implementation

The Council has taken the following decisions, which are based on recommendations by the 'Next Steps for NASCO' Working Group:

Decision 1: The Council will keep its agreements under regular review and adapt them, in the light of new information as to their effectiveness.

Decision 2: The Council will explore the feasibility of arranging a Ministerial Conference to strengthen the Parties' commitment to the conservation of wild salmon through the NASCO Convention.

Decision 3: The home-water Parties will inform the relevant NASCO Commission of the management measures established or envisaged and their expected effects.

Decision 3 will be implemented, pending agreement on the format for the information on home-water management measures. The Secretariat, in conjunction with the Task Force referred to in section 3, will establish a format which will be subsequently agreed by the Parties for utilization at the 2006 Annual Meeting.

Decision 4: The Commissions of NASCO will consider whether regulatory measures for fisheries could be adopted and scientific advice from ICES sought on a biennial or multi-year basis.

Decision 4 includes consideration of biennial or multi-year regulatory measures in all NASCO Commissions rather than just the NEAC and WGC.

Decision 5: The Council will continue and expand, as necessary, existing efforts to incorporate social and economic factors into its work.

Decision 6: The Council will include an item on its agenda entitled “New or emerging opportunities for, or threats to, salmon conservation and management” and request ICES and the NGOs to provide relevant information.

Decision 7: Stakeholder input will be solicited on standing or *ad hoc* working groups as appropriate.

Decision 8: The Council will continue to support broader stakeholder participation in the Liaison Group between NASCO and the North Atlantic salmon farming industry.

Decision 9: The Council will periodically conduct stakeholder dialogue meetings to improve outreach and education with regard to NASCO and its work and to seek information on ways to continue to improve the Organization’s work.

Decision 10: The Council will encourage accredited NGOs and, as appropriate, other stakeholders to continue to improve their cooperation with NASCO.

In order to implement Decision 10, the Secretariat should communicate the improvements identified in the Next Steps Strategic Approach to accredited NGOs and invite further suggestions for methods to improve the coordination between NGOs and NASCO.

Decision 11: Initial discussion of all agenda items will occur within the Council and Commissions. For agenda items that are discussed at Heads of Delegations meetings, the decision and rationale will be provided during discussion of those items at the full Council and Commission meetings.

Decision 12: The Council will review its relationships with other international organizations and explore areas of mutual interest.

In order to implement Decision 12, the Secretariat should conduct a review of the areas identified in the Strategic Plan and present a paper to the Parties at the 2006 Annual Meeting.

2. Decisions for Improved Public Relations to Raise the Profile of NASCO

Decision 13: The Council will create a Public Relations Group.

Decision 14: The Council will seek input from NASCO's accredited NGOs to the development of the Organization's media strategy.

Decision 15: NASCO will develop and implement a clear public relations strategy, including the establishment of a public relations group, aimed at enhancing its profile and ensuring the most effective publicity for its work and achievements.

Decision 16: The Secretariat will engage professional expertise to produce media products and to develop a more relevant, attractive, informative and interactive website.

Decision 17: NASCO will develop links with educational programmes and establish the means to achieve mutual benefits from such alignment.

Decision 18: The Council will consider the need for additional reports to improve the public understanding of information relevant to NASCO's activities.

Decisions 13 to 18 all relate to improving the methods for disseminating information on the effectiveness of NASCO.

The Public Relations Group will be composed of representatives of the Parties and will draft a public relations strategy with the objectives of enhancing the profile of NASCO and ensuring the most effective publicity for its work and achievements. The Public Relations Group will involve NGOs as appropriate. The aim is to help NASCO gain the support it needs to further its conservation work. Contracting Parties should be encouraged to involve staff in the Public Relations Group who specialise in outreach and education.

The Public Relations Group will develop a public relations strategy which will identify public relations products and services and present a plan for implementation including identification of priorities, necessary resources, and timeframe for implementation. The strategy will include:

- (1) Identification of **messages** NASCO wants to deliver, including, *inter alia*:
 - a. Annual reports on the status of salmon stocks around the North Atlantic;
 - b. Publicity for forthcoming events;
 - c. Links to and from appropriate websites;
 - d. Reports of meetings of the Council, Commissions and Working Groups;
 - e. Resolutions, Protocols, Guidelines, Codes of Practice, and other documents reflecting best practice for salmon management and conservation;
 - f. Information from national inventories;
 - g. The NASCO salmon rivers database;
 - h. Success stories, new threats and opportunities.
- (2) Identification of target **audiences**.

- (3) Identification of **products and methods** for delivering the message, including brochures, website and other promotional materials
 - a. A media strategy, which will be developed with the appropriate involvement of the NGOs;
 - b. Consideration of the use of stakeholder dialogue meetings to improve outreach and education with regard to NASCO and its work and to seek information on ways to continue to improve the Organization's work;
 - c. Consideration of the need for additional reports to improve the public understanding of information relevant to NASCO's activities.
- (4) Identification of educational programmes where NASCO could provide a link on its webpage.

The strategy will identify options for developing and implementing the above, including whether the identified products and methods can be conducted by the Contracting Parties and/or NASCO, or whether professional expertise would be required.

3. Decisions Requiring Further Consideration in Respect of their Implementation

Decision 19: The Council will create a Task Force representing the Heads of Delegations in order to further consider Council Decisions regarding implementation, commitment and accountability.

In order to further consider the decisions on implementation, commitment, accountability, transparency and inclusivity as outlined in the following sub-sections, a Task Force representing the Heads of Delegations will meet intersessionally. To the extent possible, this Task Force should meet in combination with other NASCO meetings, conducting its work electronically where possible. The report of the Task Force will be made available to the Parties well in advance of the next Annual Meeting so that its recommendations can be applied to that meeting.

3.1 Implementation, Commitment and Accountability

The Council recognizes that decisions 20 to 22 are closely related. The development of implementation plans by the Parties or relevant jurisdictions, reporting on these plans, and evaluation of progress should therefore be viewed together. These decisions should be given the highest priority as identified by the Next Steps process and must be comprehensively and thoughtfully developed intersessionally by the Task Force representing the Heads of Delegations.

The Decisions are as follows:

Decision 20: Each Party or relevant jurisdiction should develop an implementation plan for meeting the objectives of NASCO's agreements. Each Party or relevant jurisdiction should then report on steps taken pursuant to the Plan. These approaches should be evaluated after a trial period.

Decision 21: Reporting to the Council on progress in achieving the objectives should be conducted in a Special Session so as to allow direct NGO involvement, greater opportunity for discussion, and critical review of the reports made by the Parties in implementation of agreements.

Decision 22: The Council should establish an *ad hoc* group to support the President in determining the conclusions of the Special Sessions at which progress reports on Implementation Plans have been presented and reviewed.

The Task Force will address the above decisions, with full consideration of the Report of the 'Next Steps for NASCO' Working Group. The work of the Task Force should be initiated as soon as possible with the goal of implementation at the 2006 Annual Meeting of NASCO.

In this regard, the Task Force should consider, *inter alia*, the following proposals:

- Only one implementation plan for each jurisdiction is required to cover all NASCO agreements under the Precautionary Approach.
- The scope and key elements should be identified for the plan.
- As far as possible, annual reporting requirements should be brought together.
- Every effort should be made to minimize duplication of reporting.
- Guidance should be given on consistent minimum standards of reporting.
- The level of annual reporting and the format for proposed Special Sessions should be resolved.
- The composition and functioning of the *ad hoc* Working Group should be examined.

3.2 **Transparency and Inclusivity**

The 'Next Steps for NASCO' Working Group considered the existing rules governing NGO participation, particularly the rule prohibiting the issuance of press releases after the close of the opening session until NASCO has agreed its own press release. With respect to this rule, it was clarified that the intention was to ensure an effective and efficient meeting process, and not to diminish the effectiveness of stakeholder involvement in the work of NASCO or to limit the ability of NGOs to offer constructive criticism. The Parties underscored the common interests between NASCO, accredited NGOs, and certain other stakeholders and recognised the key role they play in helping NASCO fulfil its mandate.

Decision 23: The Council should seek ways to increase NGO involvement in its meetings by amending current NGO observer rules to provide discretion to the NASCO President and Commission Chairmen to recognise requests for the floor by observers on any agenda item under discussion before and after debate by the Parties on that item.

The Task Force should consider modification of the current conditions for attendance of observers at NASCO meetings in order to address this decision.