

CNL(06)45

Draft Press Release

Twenty-Third Annual Meeting
Saariselkä, Finland
June 5-8, 2006

Mystery deaths of wild Atlantic salmon tackled by NASCO

“We simply must solve the mystery of why so many Atlantic salmon are dying at sea, never getting the opportunity to return to their home rivers to reproduce. We don’t have a chance of addressing the problem until we understand it.”

Ken Whelan, President of NASCO

Today, the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization (NASCO) concluded its 23rd Annual Meeting in Saariselkä, Lapland, Finland. In the continuing fight to arrest the decline of wild Atlantic salmon stocks, NASCO agreed to step up research activities on and funding for salmon mortality on the high seas and firmly set 2008 and 2009 as the target dates for intensive marine research cruises. It also adopted a focused approach to addressing national threats. Additionally, the significant restrictions on ocean salmon fisheries in place for the last several years were continued.

At the start of the conference, the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) reported that wild Atlantic salmon populations across the North Atlantic remained at very low levels despite many years of severe reductions in commercial salmon fisheries and other conservation actions. Thus, a major advance this year was the move to establish the infrastructure to promote *SALSEA* (Salmon at Sea), a state-of-the-art international research initiative endorsed by NASCO last year that is aimed at unraveling the reasons behind the serious decline of North Atlantic salmon stocks (www.salmonatsea.com). Funds were allocated this year to support essential research under the program on the distribution and movements of salmon at sea. SALSEA is a major public/private partnership, and NASCO’s accredited non-government organizations or NGOs are playing a key role.

To maximize the number of salmon returning to spawn in their home rivers, NASCO agreed at its June meeting to continue measures to limit the West Greenland mixed stock salmon fishery to internal consumption, which is estimated to be about 20 tons. NASCO also agreed that the Faroe Islands mixed stock fishery should continue to be managed in a precautionary manner and in accordance with scientific advice. For the last few years, no fishery off the Faroe Islands has occurred. The waters around these two countries are where Atlantic salmon from all other NASCO members gather to feed and grow. These agreements were particularly significant this year as they represent a movement to longer term and more stable regulatory schemes in light of the continued poor status of the resource.

In another important step, NASCO continued to make progress in implementing recommendations from its two-year internal review process. The process has now resulted in substantial changes to the way NASCO does business. In particular, NASCO has adopted procedures to make sharing and assessing information from its members more efficient and effective.

A guiding theme for NASCO this week was finding ways to improve its transparency and inclusiveness. The Organization agreed a full partnership approach with its 27 observer NGOs. These groups are now involved in a wide range of NASCO's activities, including public relations, education, and outreach and evaluating national reports of the parties concerning salmon conservation. In addition, during annual meetings, NGOs may now participate actively in discussions.

President Whelan noted, "I am really pleased that both NASCO and its NGOs are already benefiting from our closer relationship. More than ever, we are sharing experiences and learning from each other. Given their expertise, NGOs will be particularly helpful in spreading NASCO's message and providing input on the implementation plans of the Parties. In the end, exchanging information and utilizing each other's expertise can only be good for wild Atlantic salmon."

The important decisions taken this week once again demonstrated the deep and abiding commitment NASCO, its membership, and its NGOs have to ensuring wild Atlantic salmon will be around for generations to come.

Notes for editors

NASCO is an intergovernmental organization formed to promote the conservation, restoration, enhancement, and rational management of salmon stocks in the North Atlantic Ocean. The Twenty-Third Annual Meeting of NASCO was held in Saariselkä, Finland, from June 5-8, 2006. NASCO's members are Canada, Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland), the European Union (which currently has 25 member states), Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, and the United States of America. Representatives from XX non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and X inter-governmental organizations (IGOs) also attended the meeting.

The report of the 2006 NASCO Annual Meeting with annexes and other information on Atlantic salmon and the Organization is available on the NASCO website: www.nasco.int.

The next Annual Meeting of NASCO will be held from 4 to 8 June 2007 in Bar Harbor, Maine, USA.

For more information on NASCO, contact:

Dr Malcolm Windsor
Secretary of NASCO
11 Rutland Square
Edinburgh, Scotland
EH1 2AS
Tel (+44-131) 228-2551
Fax (+44-131) 228-4384
e-mail: hq@nasco.int