

## CNL(19)50

### *Summary of discussions during the Special Session on the Evaluation of the 2019 – 2024 Implementation Plans*

**Paul Knight (Salmon and Trout Conservation UK):** made the following statement:

Mr President, Heads of Delegations, Delegates and Colleagues, I would like to reiterate what the NGOs said in our opening statement – salmon are in crisis across the North Atlantic and with the exception of agreements reached over limiting fishing at Greenland and the Faroe Islands, and closure of some mixed-stock fisheries in home waters, little has been done within or without NASCO to halt the decline. We have heard the report from the Implementation Plan (IP) Review Group, and it is now clear that the vast majority of IPs have been returned to Parties and jurisdictions for revision. So, in light of presentations and discussions at the IYS Symposium at the beginning of this week, the NGOs believe that certain issues need urgent action as IPs are reviewed:

- the primary objective of salmon management across all NASCO Parties and jurisdictions must be to produce the highest number of healthy wild salmon smolts possible from all relevant river systems. Planned actions to achieve this objective should be clearly stated in the revised IPs;
- the threat of extinctions of salmon populations is very real right across the NASCO region. The time for actions to combat stressors on wild salmon is now. For many wild salmon populations, the fourth IP cycle will be too late – the damage will have been done. SMART objectives to address the range of stressors in each jurisdiction need to be agreed with stakeholders and included in the new IPs;
- the strong message from the Symposium is that we have to change our mindset from managing wild salmon stocks to actively conserving them, otherwise extinctions will surely follow. The NGOs therefore urge NASCO Council to undertake a progressive transition from a stock management to a protection and conservation regime for wild salmon;
- we have to control what is controllable. There are plenty of targets: salmon farming, water quality, intensive agriculture, hydroelectricity and barriers to migration – all these and more can be directly addressed by NASCO Parties and jurisdictions now – it just takes the will to put the necessary actions into IPs and implement them;
- as we heard from the Symposium Steering Committee on Tuesday, aquaculture is the greatest threat in many areas. Relevant IPs have to adopt SMART actions that are genuinely targeted at achieving the agreed NASCO and ISFA objectives for sea lice and escapes;
- Parties and jurisdictions must do all in their power to mitigate the impact of climate change on wild salmon and influence wider-ranging policies within their Governments to control anthropogenic impact on global temperatures. The threat of losing sea ice completely from the Barents Sea by 2100 should be a wake-up call to everyone.

Mr President, the NGOs believe that the Symposium should be a wake-up call to NASCO that, just as scientists and policy makers have to change their mindsets to the conservation of wild Atlantic salmon rather than just managing them, so too NASCO has to adapt its objectives. For example, there are several immediate threats common to all Parties and jurisdictions that we believe NASCO has the collective power to address:

- salmon do not respect country borders. Fish heading from Spain, Portugal, France, Ireland and the UK, and from the USA and Canada, all run the risk of being impacted by open-net salmon farming in other jurisdictions. NASCO is ideally placed as a forum to reach a consensus as to how salmon farming should be operated and regulated to protect salmon across their entire range;
- NASCO should have an agreement amongst all Parties and jurisdictions that the expansion of existing open-net salmon farming industries, or any move into new territory, should be prohibited until such time as salmon farmers can prove the sustainability of their operations in terms of the protection of wild Atlantic salmon;
- the Symposium showed the importance of retaining genetic diversity amongst individual wild salmon populations. Again, NASCO is well-placed to agree a regional strategy that all Parties and jurisdictions can buy into and adapt to local issues;
- the NGOs believe that by-catch in marine pelagic fisheries is still a serious issue. NASCO should use its international forum to agree a common system whereby tagged salmon can be identified within marine monitoring programmes so that an accurate report can be compiled into the true impact of pelagic by-catch in mackerel and herring fisheries;
- information derived from marine monitoring, including SALSEA-Merge, should be used to establish Marine Protected Areas whereby pelagic fishing is prohibited in those areas at particular times when salmon are known to be present. Suitable alternative areas should be made available to impacted fishermen.

Mr President, to achieve the above, the NGOs believe that NASCO has to commit to being genuine conservators of wild Atlantic salmon. That requires consensus across NASCO Parties and jurisdictions as to the political commitment required to address all these issues which threaten wild salmon throughout the North Atlantic region. If NASCO does not step up to its responsibilities now, the very existence of the species is in jeopardy, and it will be on your watch, our watch, that history will record the demise of the King of Fish.

**Bill Hicks (Salmon and Trout Conservation UK):** made the following statement:

Mr President, I have a question about the procedure in relation to Implementation Plans.

NASCO's 'Guidelines for the Preparation and Evaluation of NASCO Implementation Plans and for Reporting on Progress', CNL(18)49, contains the following requirement:

#### 2.4 Reporting to the Annual Meeting

*The Review Group will present its evaluation of the Implementation Plans to the Annual Meeting of the Council in a Special Session, highlighting shortcomings in Implementation Plans that are considered unsatisfactory and giving suggestions for how these might be addressed, at the same time as providing examples of good practice within the Implementation Plans. The President will lead the discussions with Parties / jurisdictions concerning any shortcomings in their Implementation Plans and those Parties / jurisdictions will have an opportunity to revise their Implementation Plans after the Annual Meeting. Where the Review Group considers that there are still clear omissions or inadequacies in the actions or the answers.*

This is an important element of the IP / APR process. It provides transparency and the opportunity for engagement. This is the Special Session at which this would normally be done. However, it cannot be done this year because the new IPs are not sufficiently advanced.

I do not intend to criticise the Review Group in any way – they have been working extremely hard carrying out their important and demanding work. I seek reassurance that this important part of the IP process will still take place, but next year.

The Guidance provides at 3.4 that:

*The Review Group will present its evaluation of the Annual Progress Reports to the Annual Meeting of the Council in a Special Session, highlighting examples of good practice within the Annual Progress Reports. The President will ask the Chair to introduce any shortcomings within individual Annual Progress Reports and the President will then invite representatives of the relevant Parties / jurisdictions to take the floor in turn and respond to the Review Group's critique.*

I seek reassurance that if the Review Group identify shortcomings in the IPs that those shortcomings will be considered in the same way at next year's Annual Meeting.

**Jóannes Hansen (Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) / President of NASCO):** thanked Mr Hicks for the question and asked the Secretary to clarify the process.

**Emma Hatfield (Secretary of NASCO):** indicated that discussions are ongoing amongst the Heads of Delegations as to how this will be done. She noted that there is very strong recognition that the Next Steps process in 2004 wanted full transparency in the reviews and feedback in the IP process. This is the first time that there has been a discussion like this, among NASCO, so there is progress. She noted that there is a very clear understanding that there needs to be transparency and there is recognition that if IPs are not acceptable after the second round of review, there needs to be an agreed process. The discussions are taking place and it is hoped that the process will be agreed by the end of the week or shortly thereafter. Once agreed, everyone will be informed as to what the way forward will be.

**Robert Otto (Atlantic Salmon Federation):** stated that the IP Guidelines require consultations within the jurisdictions. He noted concern with the consultation process followed during the initial drafting of the Canadian IP. A two-hour conference call was held and the groups involved were provided with the IP approximately 24 hours in advance. There was wide consensus that this was insufficient. It was only at that point that provisions were made for written submissions. He asked Canada what the plans were to ensure that the next round of consultation on the updated IP would be more robust.

**Serge Doucet (Canada):** thanked Mr Otto for the question and recognised that this had been an issue in the previous engagement process. He stated that it is Canada's intent to improve this going forward.

**Kateryna Rakowsky (North Atlantic Salmon Fund):** asked whether there should be more specific guidance provided generally, with respect to the overall process, given the issue raised by Mr Otto.

**Jóannes Hansen (Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) / President of NASCO):** stated that he encouraged thorough reviews but was reluctant to engage in how this is done within each jurisdiction as that is a matter for each Party and jurisdiction to decide.

**Philippe Garcia (Association de Défense des Ressources Marines):** stated that salmon have two problems in the southwest Atlantic coast of France near the Pyrenees mountains. Firstly, there is an intensive coastal gill net fishery which officially catches bonito and sea bream but kills many salmon. Four unpublished scientific reports have stated on behalf of at-sea observers that each day, each fishing trip, an average of three salmon per day are caught. At the very least, this means that 4,500 fish a year are taken in June and July. He referred to legal action that has been taken against the French administration. He said that fishers had been told to

throw dead salmon back into the sea, and that they were angry about this. He stated (referring to document CNL(19)13) that when NASCO asked the French Government about coastal catches, they said they did not know.

Secondly, in the Adour estuary, there is an official drift net fishery with a dozen commercial fishermen. They officially report 1,500 fish without any scientific advice, any quota, or any monitoring of conservation limits. He felt that France is failing for many reasons. The gill net fishery is a mixed fishery which takes half the salmon entering the Adour estuary and many other rivers like the Nivelle, the Bidasoa and Spanish rivers including in Asturias. This drift net fishery is also a mixed fishery which falls far below conservation limits. He gave the example of the Gave de Pau river, which has been stocked for 15 years without any noticeable effect on native reproduction. He commented that both fisheries are taking place in NATURA 2000 areas which have been designated to protect salmon and shad and are under Annex 2 and 5 of the 1992 Habitat Directive. He requested that NASCO and the EU investigate this in the southern corner of Europe – France, Spain and Portugal.

**Arnaud Peyronnet (European Union):** thanked Philippe Garcia for raising the issue. He noted that it had been mentioned in both the North-East Atlantic Commission and the West Greenland Commission. He said there is concern about the allegations and that the EU will look into the precise elements of both fisheries. He stated that they have already liaised with the French authorities to gather information and will report to NASCO. It may be possible to include some elements of this in the next Implementation Plan, if necessary.

**Dwayne Shaw (Downeast Salmon Federation):** asked whether fish populations are being measured as they should be, given tools for genetics assessment are available. He reported that in the United States success is largely measured based on the overall biodiversity of the populations at a very fine scale, down to sub-populations within rivers or sub-populations within the overall scope of the range within the United States. This is not necessarily consistent across all jurisdictions. He sought assurance that, given the tools that are currently available, current conservation biology practices are keeping pace with technology. He stated that measuring numbers of fish does not give a fine enough granularity to reflect populations as a whole, that each river's inventory can be done at a scale commensurate with how the population actually behaves. He noted that technology is rapidly changing and conservation biologists may not necessarily be keeping pace with what is possible. He asked for assurances that things other than numbers of fish will be measured in the future.

**Jóannes Hansen (Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) / President of NASCO):** replied that NASCO should be very open to ways of improving this. More generally, in distant water fisheries, NASCO measurements are based on scientific advice through ICES. He noted that ICES is aware of various ways of doing this. He commented that what each Party does in their own waters is up to them, but that it is important to raise these matters so that management advice is based on the best available scientific advice. It should ensure that the best scientific advice is carried out with the best available tools.

**Miron Borgulev (WWF – Russia):** commented on the strong connection between salmon rivers and forests. This means salmon conservation organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, need to interact with forestry authorities and influence forestry legislation. In Russia for example, after 1 July, protection for spawning rivers is excluded from Russian forestry legislation. He noted support for the efforts of the Federal Fishery Agency to establish fisheries protection forest zones. He asked the President if NASCO could write to the Russian Federal Agency for Forestry to express concern about the protection of spawning rivers from felling and for NASCO to consider developing guidelines on forestry management and legislation and interactions with forestry authorities on spawning rivers.

**Jóannes Hansen (Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) / President of NASCO):** replied that this is an internal matter for Russia. NASCO should not engage with how the Russian Federation choose to deal with these problems. He said therefore that NASCO could not send a letter expressing concern. He also said that NASCO already has habitat guidelines.

**Andrew Graham-Stewart (Salmon and Trout Conservation Scotland):** noted that one of the presentations had said that great progress had been made by NASCO Parties in the last few years. He disagreed that there has been great progress, especially on the salmon farming front. He commented that each June, delegations and civil servants attended NASCO meetings and each year a Press Release summarises what had been achieved. In the past five years, the Press Releases have said almost nothing. He noted that they included talk of developing research at sea, the International Year of the Salmon and new measures for Faroes and Greenland. The Press Releases sometimes include a quote about how committed the Parties are to Atlantic salmon conservation. However, he asked, apart from the closure of some, mostly minor, mixed-stock fisheries, what significant actions have the Parties agreed, or taken in the last six years? He asked where the actions, so desperately needed to address the damaging impacts of salmon farming, are? He stated that from an NGO perspective these meetings are largely a matter of process. At the end of the week, having successfully avoided making any commitments to taking any future action that would make any real difference, the Parties are able to return home – ‘Mission Accomplished’.

He said he can imagine the conversation, when the Head of Delegation gets back to his or her home country: ‘Don’t worry Minister, NASCO was just the usual talking shop. As long as we pay vague lip-service to conserving and protecting wild salmon we can proceed as normal and allow our salmon farming industry to keep on expanding, whatever the consequences for wild fish.’ Mr Graham-Stewart noted that the failure of NASCO in this regard is not the fault of the Secretariat, but the responsibility of the Parties who appear to conspire each year to ensure that no real progress is made. He said he hoped to be proved wrong. He asked, aside from the closure of few, mainly minor, mixed-stock fisheries, what significant action has been taken in the last six years to conserve and protect wild Atlantic salmon, and why has there been no progress whatsoever towards achieving the NASCO goals on sea lice and escapes as set out in the Williamsburg Resolution?

**Jóannes Hansen (Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) / President of NASCO):** thanked Mr Graham-Stewart for his candid and direct question. He noted that NASCO manages distant-water fisheries and that within the Faroese zone there are no fisheries at all and within the Greenlandic zone the fishery is very limited. Therefore NASCO lives up to its obligations in that area. He also noted that under the Annual Progress Reports each country with salmon rivers is encouraged to report on these matters. NASCO tries to improve, such as with Special Sessions and the IYS. However, he felt that it is fair to say that a lot of the tasks that are to be done now, are in homewater countries. In that respect NASCO can only be a vessel in which Parties can deliberate and encourage action. NASCO cannot actually take such action, but can set up frameworks in which action can be taken.

**Kim Damon-Randall (United States):** replied to Mr Graham-Stewart’s salmon farming question. She commented that the United States has made considerable progress in the last few years on aquaculture issues, as reported in the North American Commission. She noted that there had been no reportable escapes this year and no diseases to report. The United States talk frequently with Canadian counterparts about aquaculture issues that are transborder.

**Cathal Gallagher (European Union – Ireland):** noted some progress achieved in Ireland through the NASCO framework: closure of a huge mixed stock fishery, not a small one; the

development of conservation limits; individual river management; and lots of work on barrier removals. He noted that sometimes these programmes are not being sufficiently acknowledged.

He recognised that the area that needs further work is aquaculture, as identified in the Review Group report. He commented that new SMART actions are now included in the IP template so that a cycle is beginning where maybe there will be more specific measurements and data coming back. He also noted the mandatory elements of the new IP template, under which jurisdictions must have specific actions on sea lice and containment. He said that everyone had the goal of improving aquaculture businesses. There will be a strong focus through the mandatory elements of the plans, to address that.

**Alan Wells (Fisheries Management Scotland):** asked a question relating to Scotland's draft IP, and specifically section four on aquaculture. He noted that the draft IP for Scotland makes several references to processes and policies that relate to farmed fish health, rather than the conservation of wild salmon. He asked whether the Scottish Government would make an unambiguous commitment to bring forward an amended IP, in which section four focuses solely on the protection and conservation of wild fish from the known impacts of aquaculture?

**Mike Palmer (European Union – UK, Scotland):** replied that section four of Scotland's IP was drafted before the Scottish Government was able to respond to the Parliamentary Inquiry on the impacts of salmon farming on the environment, including on wild salmon. Since then, the Government's response to that enquiry has been published, which makes clear that the Scottish Government recognise there is a gap in current regulation, in terms of the interactions between farmed and wild fish. He said they will be doing work on addressing and closing the gap and will be consulting later this year on proposals for tightening regulation. Then the intention would be to update the IP to reflect that work. That will address the question of ensuring that the target in the IP is the protection and conservation of wild salmon. It will make clear how that follows through from the impacts of salmon farming.

In response to Mr Graham-Stewart, he noted that Scotland is one of the largest salmon farming nations within the EU block. He said that the NASCO framework has been useful in helping to promote a more energetic and intensive approach towards the regulation of salmon farming within Scotland. There has been increased momentum over the last year or so. He noted that the work of NASCO gives helpful international support. The NASCO framework gives confidence to Ministers that there is international promotion of increased activity around sea lice reporting. He noted the recent announcement in the Scottish Parliament of a new statutory regime under which there will be weekly reporting of sea lice counts. The NASCO framework has helped deliver these advances, sometimes in intangible ways. He noted that the Scottish Government will be doing more, in terms of the regulatory improvements.

**Mark Bilsby (Atlantic Salmon Trust):** asked about the SMART nature of the Implementation Plans, and whether progress towards attainment of NASCO's goals will be objectively assessed over time. He noted that ICES provide Greenland and the Faroe Islands with useful scientific advice on the suitability of data collection. He asked whether ICES could provide scientific guidance and commentary on the suitability of the IPs. He said this would provide consistent information across the Commissions, on how the measures are being monitored, and their success or failure.

**Cathal Gallager (European Union - Ireland):** noted that there is already a review process for IPs agreed by Heads of Delegation. It would be unclear how another process from a scientific organization commenting on management plans for individual jurisdictions would work.

**Ghislain Chouinard (ICES, ACOM Advisory Committee Vice-Chair):** replied that ICES gets requests for advice from NASCO and sometimes provides advice on management plans.

He said it may be possible for ICES to comment on Implementation Plans, but it would depend on how the request was shaped. It would also depend on whether ICES has the expertise and data to be able to respond.

**Ken Whelan (Atlantic Salmon Trust):** commented that the context of the Implementation Plans should be considered. He recalled the reason NASCO was established – to deal with the issues that no jurisdiction could deal with alone. In the Symposium there were at least two areas of shared problems, which originate in one jurisdiction and impact several others. He asked if the Implementation Plans, as they currently exist, or NASCO as it currently exists, are capable of supporting those mixed impacts. He gave two examples. First, pink salmon. He noted that invasive species may be a problem for a particular jurisdiction. One jurisdiction's problem may become other jurisdictions' problems in time. The challenge is to think about how to deal with shared general issues into the future. Second, only now are the implications of intensive salmon farming being understood in relation to genetics, sea lice and migratory corridors. If migratory corridors are better understood, where very large numbers of mixed-stock salmon populations are passing a particular impact (farm), it may be possible to combine forces to deal with this. He said that he would encourage groups looking at the IPs to consider this. He also noted that as the next steps for NASCO are considered, how NASCO can deal with these problems in an integrated way is important, because it will be wholly unsatisfactory to deal with them separately.

**Steve Sutton (Atlantic Salmon Federation):** commented that one of the strong themes from the Symposium was around human dimensions, the importance of engagement and collaboration. He said there had been some good examples of how collaboration and engagement can lead to better outcomes. He noted that it is not NASCO's role to tell Parties how to consult on their IPs and that NASCO's role is more to provide guidance and to help provide consistency across IPs. He noted that NASCO does have guidance around incorporation of socio-economic concerns and that it might be an opportune time to revisit those guidelines. This might include guidance to Parties as to what acceptable consultation looks like. Parties could report on the process they used to help them meet the guidelines.

**Jóannes Hansen (Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) / President of NASCO):** replied that as President he is open to the guidelines being revisited, but it is something that needs to be revisited in Council.

**Paul Knight (Salmon and Trout Conservation UK):** commented that the English IP consultation process was good. The England Fisheries Group, which is representative of the national bodies, including Rivers Trusts, held a meeting. A representative from Cefas gave a presentation on the Implementation Plan and the drafts. Comments were made, the draft was circulated and there was plenty of time to provide written responses. Some written responses were taken into account and the IP was produced. He felt it was a good process and commended colleagues in England. He noted that he is looking forward to a similar process for the revised IP.

**Dwayne Shaw (Downeast Salmon Federation):** asked how specifically the NASCO Council might consider integrating indigenous voices in the overall IP process and whether there is there any consideration of changing the current process?

**Jóannes Hansen (Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) / President of NASCO):** replied that that is also about socio-economics and something the Council could consider if they revisit that process.

**Andrew Graham-Stewart (Salmon and Trout Conservation Scotland):** commented that Scotland, like England, consulted well on their IP. Some of the NGO's comments were incorporated. He thanked Scotland.

**Nigel Milner (Institute of Fisheries Management):** asked about setting SMART objectives for habitat restoration in rivers, in the absence of clear understanding of the current productivity of rivers, and the potential carrying capacity of rivers. He said he could not see how SMART objectives could be set in the absence of that type of information. Clear inventories of current capacity in fresh water are lacking and are needed.

**Cathal Gallager (European Union - Ireland):** replied that one of the actions for delegations could be to give a timeline for the development of inventories. He noted that this could be a good example of how to link up an action to something to be done. The challenge is identified – not having that information – and the action is firmly related to it with a time limit.