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Summary of the Discussions during the Special Session on the Evaluation of Annual Progress Reports under the 2013 - 2018 Implementation Plans

Ms Sue Scott (Atlantic Salmon Federation, NGO Co-Chair): highlighted the need for the Implementation Plans (IPs) and Annual Progress Reports (APRs) to provide clear evidence of progress in protecting and conserving wild Atlantic salmon. Following the first reporting cycle, the Council had agreed that NASCO Parties and jurisdictions should identify actions to be taken with measurable outcomes in the second round of IPs that applied to the period 2013 - 2018. She noted that without this information it is very hard to review progress.

Ms Francesca Arena (European Union): noted that there are two clear messages from the Review Group's report. First, there needs to be quantitative information in the APRs to provide evidence of progress towards the measurable goals for the actions contained in the IPs. There is room for improvement on this aspect. Second, she referred to the progress made in the number of jurisdictions submitting IPs/APRs. She indicated that she welcomed the improvements in the transparency in reporting and looked forward to further improvements in future.

Mr Emanuel Rosing (Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland)): thanked the Review Group for its work and indicated that his delegation recognised that the IP/APR reporting process was a step in the right direction but considers that, in the interests of fairness and balance, the NASCO Convention should apply equally to all Parties.

Ms Sue Scott (Atlantic Salmon Federation, NGO Co-Chair): referred to new measures in Canada intended to protect grilse in the Maritime Provinces and Quebec and asked what measures would be implemented to protect large salmon, particularly those below their conservation limits.

Mr Richard Nadeau (Canada): responded that for Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island there was a policy of no retention of salmon. In Quebec, the management is on a river-by-river basis linked to attainment of conservation limits, and retention of salmon has been prohibited on a number of rivers with a mid-season review to determine if the closure should be maintained. Additionally, any river can be closed in the event of concerns about stock status. He referred to the establishment of a Ministerial Advisory Committee on Atlantic salmon, but noted that it has not yet reported its findings which are due later in the year.

Mr Dave Meerburg (Atlantic Salmon Federation): noted that the Canadian APR makes reference to changes being made to the conservation limits following a scientific review 12 - 18 months ago. He asked when the new conservation limits would be put in place and made available to the ICES Working Group on North Atlantic Salmon (WGNAS) for use in the assessments, including those relating to the West Greenland Commission.

Mr Richard Nadeau (Canada): responded that although the process started 18 months ago, the new conservation limits will not be introduced until after the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Atlantic salmon has reported. In response to a follow-up question from Mr

Meerburg, he indicated that hopefully the new conservation limits could be made available to ICES in time for the 2016 assessments.

Mr Andrew Graham-Stewart (Salmon and Trout Association (Scotland)): indicated that the Salmon and Trout Association was greatly encouraged by Scotland's direction of travel with regard to mixed-stock fisheries. If the principle of only harvesting stocks that are clearly sustainable is adhered to, then the proposed new system of licensing, carcass tagging and quotas proposed for 2016 will represent real and welcome progress. He was, however, concerned about the Scottish Government's response on sea lice monitoring and enforcement. Specifically, the following statement:

'Of a total of 267 seawater fish farm sites that were active during 2014, sea lice inspections were conducted at 86 and enhanced sea lice inspections were conducted at a further 29. All farms inspected were found to have effective sea lice management in place for the aquaculture animals under their care, which met the requirements of the regulatory regime under the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2007. No reports of increased sea lice loads or lice-induced mortality of wild salmonids attributable to the farms was reported to the Marine Scotland's Fish Health Inspectorate during 2014.'

He indicated that this wording gives the impression that all is well with sea lice control in Scotland which he considered to be very far from the truth. He noted that last year, for example, Marine Harvest had lost control at sites in Wester Ross. The situation became progressively worse and by the time the fish were eventually harvested, the average number of adult female lice per farmed fish was 40. He added that in the north-west Highlands, salmon farms of the well-known company Loch Duart (supplier of farmed salmon to royalty and celebrity chefs) recently exceeded the industry's Code of Good Practice thresholds for sea lice treatment for an astonishing 24 months out of 27. He noted that just before this year's wild smolt runs, lice numbers were 16 times over the threshold. He stressed that these were not isolated incidents and billions of sea lice larvae spread from salmon farms to infect wild fish. He added that just two weeks prior to the Annual Meeting, two post-smolt sea trout carrying over 500 sea lice were caught during sweep net monitoring. He noted that no enforcement action is taken against farms when they breach sea lice guidelines. As long as they continue to treat against lice, when they are above the industry's thresholds, the farmers are not committing any offence. In the meantime, he believes that wild fish have no protection whatsoever. He asked the Scottish Government to confirm that this situation is untenable and indeed intolerable and, if so, when does the Scottish Government intend to bring forward and/or employ measures to ensure that wild fish have statutory, legal protection when lice numbers on farms are out of control? He indicated that he was referring to a statutory requirement for farms to immediately cull out all stock when sea lice levels exceed a certain limit and treatment, as happens all too often, is having no effect.

Mr Willie Cowan (European Union – UK (Scotland)): noted that the issues referred to were disappointing as the Scottish Government is working with both sectors to address the interactions between farmed and wild salmon. There has been much activity and investment both in relation to research and the practical management of sea lice, including the use of cleaner fish (wrasse) which are proving to be successful in most areas where they are being deployed. He referred to the Scottish Government-funded Aquaculture Innovation Centre

whose priority is the management and control of sea lice. The work with both the salmon farming industry and the wild fish sector is ongoing to manage interactions.

Mr Niall Greene (Salmon Watch Ireland): acknowledged that the information presented in the APR for Ireland in relation to the status of salmon stocks and their management and on habitat protection and restoration is a fair description of the situation in Ireland. However, he indicated that there were numerous inadequacies in the APR in relation to aquaculture. He wished to illustrate the chaotic state of the Irish Government's management of salmon farming by using a case study relating to escapees. He stated that the Irish NGO 'Friends of the Irish Environment' had described the situation as 'a complete breakdown of the salmon farming licensing system'. He indicated that on 4 March 2014, a farmer in the south of Ireland had reported an escape of 230,000 salmon to the authorities following a severe storm on 1 February, a month beforehand. The licence conditions require reports to be submitted within four days of the escape event and he asked what legal or administrative action would be taken in respect of the delay in reporting the event or, more importantly, for any deficiencies in the management of the farm. He referred to a statement in the APR in relation to this escape event that indicated that 'there is no evidence of a large-scale fish escape - but the possibility that fish escaped and survived cannot be ruled out. There have been no reported occurrences of escapes being detected in neighbouring rivers'. However, the same authorities in Ireland, seem to have reported the event as an escape to ICES. Furthermore, he noted that the Irish authorities have consistently rebuffed efforts to gain access to the two engineering reports carried out into the incident on the grounds that it was not in the public interest. He noted that in a 2011 report into the escape of 80,000 fish, the inspector had commented that 'if more rigorous/frequent mooring inspections had been carried out it is possible, even likely, that there would have been earlier detection which would have avoided the November 2010 failures'. An Assistant Secretary in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Environment had agreed with the inspector's report but there was no response other than the Minister of Agriculture, Food and the Marine indicating, in a response to a Parliamentary Question, that new cage specifications were being developed for inclusion in a new protocol. He noted that the engineering report for 2012 - 2014, seen by Friends of the Irish Environment, highlights a litany of other transgressions: farms located outside their licensed areas; GPS not working; cages in bad condition; sites that were overstocked by up to three times their permitted tonnage; and failure to provide stocking figures. In 2014, the Irish Government filed a Programme of Measures with the European Commission in relation to salmon farming. This included a new Monitoring and Compliance Unit which had been established to strengthen the adherence to the terms and conditions of all aquaculture licences. There is no evidence (and no reference in the APR) that this unit, if it indeed exists, has made any difference to a situation in which salmon farmers basically do whatever they want. In over 30 years of Irish salmon farming, not one farmer has ever been prosecuted for licence transgressions and there is only one recorded incident of punitive administrative action having been taken. He considered that this was a system out of control, but that this was not the impression given by the APR.

Mr Denis Maher (European Union - Ireland): responded that he was gratified by the comments from Mr Greene relating to the information presented in the APR on stock status and protection of stocks for which his department, the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, is responsible. A separate department, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is responsible for aquaculture development and licensing. There is a significant level of contact between departments on the issue of the interactions between wild

and farmed salmonids and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine was consulted on the three questions submitted in advance of the meeting and for which responses have been provided. He added that in relation to the questions raised he would contact the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. That department had indicated that ‘there was no evidence of a large escape but the possibility that fish escaped and survived can’t be ruled out’, and he indicated that he could not expand on that information since investigations are a matter for that department. However, the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources will continue to engage with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to seek responses to the questions raised on the escape incident and what sanctions might be imposed on licencees in this and other instances where licence terms appear to be breached or there appears to be a failure to report escapes adequately.

Mr Torfinn Evensen (Norske Lakseelver): welcomed the acknowledgement of the need to recapture escaped farmed salmon in Norway but noted that the system was not yet fully established nor was it clear who was responsible for implementing it. A new regulation indicates that recapture actions should be planned, but the industry may not support the implementation of recapture efforts. He suggested that the effective recapture of escapees requires marking of all farmed salmon, for example by the removal of the adipose fin, and that tracing of escapees to the farm of origin could be achieved by tagging farmed salmon using, for example, coded wire tags. He asked what progress had been made towards implementing this new obligation to recapture farmed salmon and towards achievement of NASCO’s goal of zero escapes.

Mr Helge Lorentzen (Norway): indicated that discussions were ongoing but, as in Ireland, different Ministries are involved in protection of wild salmon and aquaculture development and regulation in Norway. He noted that it is no secret that a new White Paper on future aquaculture developments has just been finalised that contains proposals for actions and the expectation is that the responsible authorities will follow-up on that. The Directorate of the Environment will do its utmost to ensure that the proposals are implemented.

Mr Noel Carr (Federation of Irish Salmon and Sea Trout Anglers): referred to coastal netting of wild salmon in Norway and the findings of the recent research programme, Kolarctic Salmon. He stated that it is clear from this research that multiple stocks, including salmon from Russia, are exploited in the coastal fishery in Finnmark, and he asked the Russian delegation to comment on the management measures in place in Norway. He also asked if it was possible that sea lice from Norwegian salmon farms were damaging salmon smolts migrating from Russian rivers. With regard to aquaculture in Ireland, he noted that there is denial and confusion in relation to salmon farming and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine needs to be challenged as to why Ireland’s marine environment is being put at risk.

Ms Francesca Arena (European Union): noted that most questions during the Special Session had focussed on the issue of aquaculture, specifically sea lice and containment. While colleagues working on aquaculture were not present at the 2015 Annual Meeting, there is clearly interest in a Theme-based Special Session on this topic at the 2016 Annual Meeting with appropriate expertise participating so as to review best practice in minimising impacts of aquaculture on the wild salmon stocks.

Mr Denis Maher (European Union - Ireland): indicated that the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources supports the development of aquaculture where this is environmentally sustainable and while that department does not have a mandate for aquaculture development, it is responsible for the protection of wild salmon stocks. He noted that some media reports had emerged in recent days about the engineering report and these are being examined by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and that this Department is also investigating the serious matter of alleged dumping of farmed salmon. In addition, responses to questions raised regarding this alleged incident of dumping of farmed fish would be sought

Mr Paul Knight (Salmon and Trout Association, NGO Co-Chair): indicated that the NGOs supported holding a Theme-based Special Session on aquaculture during the 2016 Annual Meeting and suggested that a full day should be devoted to this important topic. He noted that NASCO's role is to conserve and restore wild salmon and not to promote aquaculture, so it will be important to review what progress has been made to protect wild salmon stocks. At present, aquaculture practices in relation to sea lice and containment are not sustainable.

Mr Daniel Morris (United States): stated that it had been an interesting Special Session during which the Parties had been challenged with some interesting questions and on the basis of the dialogue there could be a need for improvements over the coming year. He noted that in reviewing the APRs, it is important to look not only for shortcomings but successes and there was much to be learned from the information presented, e.g. in relation to the utility of carcass tagging and measures to improve fish passage.

Mr Jóannes Hansen (Vice-President of NASCO): thanked the Review Group for its work in evaluating the APRs and for its recommendations for improvements to future reporting. He thanked all those who had asked questions and welcomed the transparent approach to reviewing progress in implementing NASCO's agreements. He then closed the Special Session.