Agenda item 7.1
For information

Council

CNL(18)20

Salmon farming: NGOs demand that Governments honour the Williamsburg Resolution commitments

(Tabled by the NGOs)

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Photo: Eva Thorstad

It is now 15 years since the Williamsburg Resolution was adopted by NASCO parties and two years since the Special Session on the impacts of salmon farming. The Steering Committee for the Special Session subsequently concluded that "there is now an urgent need for all Parties/jurisdictions to adopt stronger measures if their international responsibilities are to be met, which it believes is not currently the case".

The Steering Committee underlined the Williamsburg goals that:

- there is no increase in sea lice loads or lice-induced mortality of wild salmonids attributable to the farms

- 100% of farmed fish are retained in all production facilities

In 2016 the NGOs, produced "Salmon farming: the continuing damage and required solutions" (CNL(16)54), which summarised the situation in the four NASCO countries where farmed/wild interactions are most acute.

Below are updates on Norway, Scotland, Canada and Ireland.

Norway

- 50% decline in return of salmon spawners to Norwegian rivers over the last 30 years.
- A large meta study has estimated an overall 18% lower return of salmon spawners attributable to sea lice. From >40% in farm intensive areas to 0 % in regions with no salmon farming activity.
- In a recent survey of 104 salmon stocks, 80% did not meet the minimum quality requirements defined by the Norwegian government. The main cause is loss of genetic integrity due to cross breeding with farm escapees.
- Scientific consensus that the sea lice effect is even worse for sea trout that for salmon.
- Sea lice and escapees are recognised by scientists as the (only) two non-stabilised existential threats against wild salmonids in Norway.
- New aquaculture licences (intended for development of novel technology) are currently issued without any evaluation of their potential negative effect on the environment in general and wild salmonids in particular.

Scotland

- Still no sustained reduction in farm sea lice numbers. Voluntary thresholds set by the industry code of good practice take no account of the number of fish in a management area and are not designed to be protective of wild fish. There are no legal powers to regulate the salmon farming industry to protect wild fish.
- New Scottish Government sea lice policy, as agreed with the industry and announced at NASCO in 2016, does not protect wild salmonids. The very generous upper limit of eight lice is frequently exceeded (as high as 29 lice per fish) and only one enforcement notice has been issued and no enforced harvests to date.
- Parliamentary Committee (2018) concludes that "the current regulatory process does not give sufficient consideration to the impact of salmon farming on wild salmonids". Committee states that "if the current issues are not addressed [industry growth targets] will be unsustainable and may cause irrecoverable damage to the environment". Permissions for new farms and extra tonnage continue to be granted; the industry aims to double production by 2030.
- Almost all rivers in the Aquaculture Zone are failing their official Conservation Limits. In many formerly prolific west coast rivers wild salmon catches have declined to close to zero. West coast lochs have lost virtually all their large sea trout – on which fisheries depend.

Canada

- Everywhere net pen aquaculture operates in eastern Canada, wild salmon populations have been formally assessed as "threatened" or "endangered", and with one minor exception, everywhere there are "threatened" or "endangered" populations, there is extensive aquaculture. Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO)'s recovery potential assessments for these populations consistently identify salmon farming as being of a high level of concern to recovery and survival.
- DFO's research has confirmed widespread genetic introgression from aquaculture escapees into "threatened" wild populations on the south coast of Newfoundland. No remedial action has been taken.
- Massive expansion of the industry along the south coast of Newfoundland was approved without a full environmental assessment, in violation of provincial environmental assessment legislation (the approval eventually overturned by the Supreme Court and a full environmental assessment ordered). The importation of triploid European strain salmon for use in net pens has been approved, despite concerns about the triploidy induction process being <100% successful.
- The use of transgenic salmon in land-based grow-out operations has been approved without an up-to-date risk assessment.
- A report by Gardner Pinfold Consultants revealed that aquaculture regulations in eastern Canada do not meet international standards for protecting wild salmon.
- An audit by the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development concluded that DFO has "no way of knowing what impacts salmon farming has on the health of wild fish," and that DFO has "not managed risks from salmon farming in a way that protected wild fish."

Ireland

- Continuing decline in salmon catches despite almost total removal of mixed stock fishing.
- Of 143 rivers in 2018, 66 are closed to all exploitation (62 in 2017), 36 (28) have mandatory catch and release imposed and 41 (55) are open for catching.
- Total salmon catch in 2017 was 72.1 tonnes (it was 76.3 tonnes in 2007 when drift netting was ended).
- Decline most pronounced in western rivers inflicted with salmon farms in their estuaries.
- Sea trout virtually wiped out in the west where salmon farms predominate.
- Escapes from salmon farms now a major issue with absolutely no effective regulatory response.
- Rising water temperatures appear to be increasing incidence of farmed salmon diseases such as AGD.
- NGO action has prevented new licences for salmon farming being issued.

It is highly probable that salmon smolts from countries without major salmon farming industries, such as Germany, Sweden, England, Wales, Northern Ireland, France, Spain and USA (all of which have severely depleted populations), migrate through or past intensive salmon farming areas with implications for sea lice infestation and thus survival.

Photo: Bengt Finstad

It is clear that, since the 2016 Special Session and its Steering Committee's subsequent re-emphasis of the Williamsburg Resolution, there has been little (if any) progress in addressing the relevant issues. In fact, in many areas the situation has deteriorated significantly.

NASCO parties with major salmon farming industries are in effect prioritising further expansion of salmon farming at the expense of wild salmon and sea trout in fundamental breach of NASCO principles – which all NASCO parties are committed to upholding. Whilst damage to wild salmonid populations continues, we believe that it is unconscionable and indeed contrary to NASCO resolutions for producing countries to sanction or encourage any further growth of open cage salmon farming.

It is unacceptable for NASCO parties simply to pay superficial lip service to NASCO principles.

The 2016 Special Session Steering Committee was adamant that "the absence of adequate scientific information should not be used as a reason for postponing conservation and management measures" and "that there is now sufficient evidence of significant impacts

having occurred that all Parties/jurisdictions with salmon farms must implement further, more stringent measures to protect the wild stocks from the impacts of salmon farming if they are to meet their obligations under the NASCO Convention."

NASCO parties with salmon farming industries should now urgently implement –

- Strict regulatory regimes with rigorous monitoring and enforcement backed by effective legislation.
- Statutory legal protection for wild fish from the impacts of salmon farming.
- Strict limits on the number of sea lice per farmed fish, based on expert independent advice.
- Compulsory culling/early harvesting of farmed fish when sea lice limits are consistently exceeded.
- Relocation of farms away from proximity to river mouths and migration routes.
- Severe financial penalties when escapes occur.
- Coherent plans and timescales for moving the industry into production units which physically separate wild from farmed fish – we believe the only way to achieve this is within closed containment tanks, either sea or land-based.

We welcome the aspirational "road map" for the future of salmon farming in Norway, launched in 2017 by Norsk Industri (The Federation of Norwegian Industries), which includes Marine Harvest, the world's largest salmon farmer. It proposes that, by 2030, all salmon must be farmed using technologies that ensure –

- Zero dissemination of sea lice.
- Zero escapes.
- Zero loss of particulate organic matter.

This "three zeroes" policy is, in essence, a road map towards closed containment. Similar, but legally binding, road maps should now be adopted by all salmon farming countries. The only long-term solution for eliminating negative impacts by salmon farming on wild salmonids is closed containment, either in tanks in the sea or on land.

Before closed containment becomes a reality, we (the undersigned) are adamant that Norway, Scotland, Canada and Ireland must now take swift and effective remedial action to honour their obligations under the NASCO Convention.

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