

IP(08)10

Fisheries Management Focus Area Report

Iceland

ICELAND

Management of Salmon Fisheries

Focus Area Report

(Draft)

April 2008

Introduction

The Council has asked each Party or jurisdiction to prepare a fisheries management focus area report to provide a more in-depth assessment of:

- the measures already in place that address the NASCO agreements relating to fisheries management;
- further actions proposed within their Implementation Plans to meet these agreements;
- progress with implementing these actions.

This report is a step in order to follow the NASCO agreement. For ease of review and standardization we decided to follow the guidelines of the *Ad Hoc* review Group (CNL40.517) listed under headlines 1-10 in this report. This report is inevitably considerably condensed but further details on various issues can be obtained from the Icelandic Implementation Plan IP(07)8 with subsequent amendments.

Salmonid management is the responsibility of the Salmonid Management Division of the Directorate of Fisheries, which in subsequent text will be referred to as the “Competent Management Authority”.

1. A brief description of the fisheries, including an overview of the stocks exploited, gear types, fishery location, magnitude of the fishery, current management restrictions and others planned.

The principles of the Icelandic Salmon Management system are shown in brief form in table 1. It is important to note that since 1932 coastal fisheries for salmon have been prohibited by law although some 12 netting location with heritable rights were exempted. These were gradually phased out and from 1997 onwards all harvest of salmon in Iceland has been in fresh water after a permanent buy-out agreement between the owners of the fishing rights and the Icelandic Government was enacted.

Table 1. Principles of the Icelandic Salmon Management System

Ocean fishery:	Forbidden
Fishing rights:	Go with the adjoining land
Local Management Authority:	River (Fisheries) Associations mandatory
Fishing gear allowed:	Rod and gillnets
Number of rods and nets:	Restricted
Annual fishing time:	Max 105 days from 20 April – 30 September (90 days most common)
Daily fishing hours in rod fishery:	12 hours 7AM - 10PM
Weekly netting closure:	Half week , Friday 10 PM - Tuesday 10 AM
Reporting of catch:	Mandatory in log-books in rod fisheries, daily recordings in net fisheries

Management responsibility: Fisheries associations are responsible for the local management under the auspices of the Salmon Management Division of the Directorate of Fisheries. Fisheries Associations for each jurisdiction have to make an “Effort Plan” for their salmon stock that specify the maximum number of angling rods for a minimum period of 8 years (from 2006). The “Effort Plan” can otherwise be a fairly flexible document but needs to be approved by the “Competent Management Authority”.

1.1. By-catch of salmon in oceanic fisheries

In 2004 and 2005 the by-catch of salmon in the fisheries of the Icelandic Fishing fleet was estimated (Guðbergsson and Sigþórsson 2006, ICES 2006). The estimate was conducted through a questionnaire which reached half of the fishermen that were registered on a ship during this period. The outcome of the surveys shows approximately the same results for both years giving a figure of 5.110 (3.165-7.055) salmon taken as by-catch in marine fisheries per annum. The fish were mainly caught by large ships in pelagic fisheries. Over 80 % were regarded as medium or large salmon and 84,5% were caught during the summer months (April-September). Of the observed by-catch of salmon 38 % were taken outside the Icelandic EEZ. No information on the origin of the fish is available. See also CNL(03)27 on by-catches of salmon in pelagic herring fisheries.

1.2. Enhancement programs

Enhancement programs have been used in Icelandic rivers for decades. Enhancement programs can be building of fish ladders, release of hatchery reared fry, parr or smolts. An increasing trend has been in the release of hatchery reared smolts to enhance the salmon run. The aim is to improve the rod catch in rivers or river parts where nursery areas are poor. Releases into established salmon rivers need to be the progeny of the native stock. If enhancement programs are conducted each Fisheries Association needs to make an enhancement plan, which must be renewed every 5 years. The enhancement plan must be approved by the Competent Management Authority after receiving a comment from the Institute of Freshwater Fisheries.

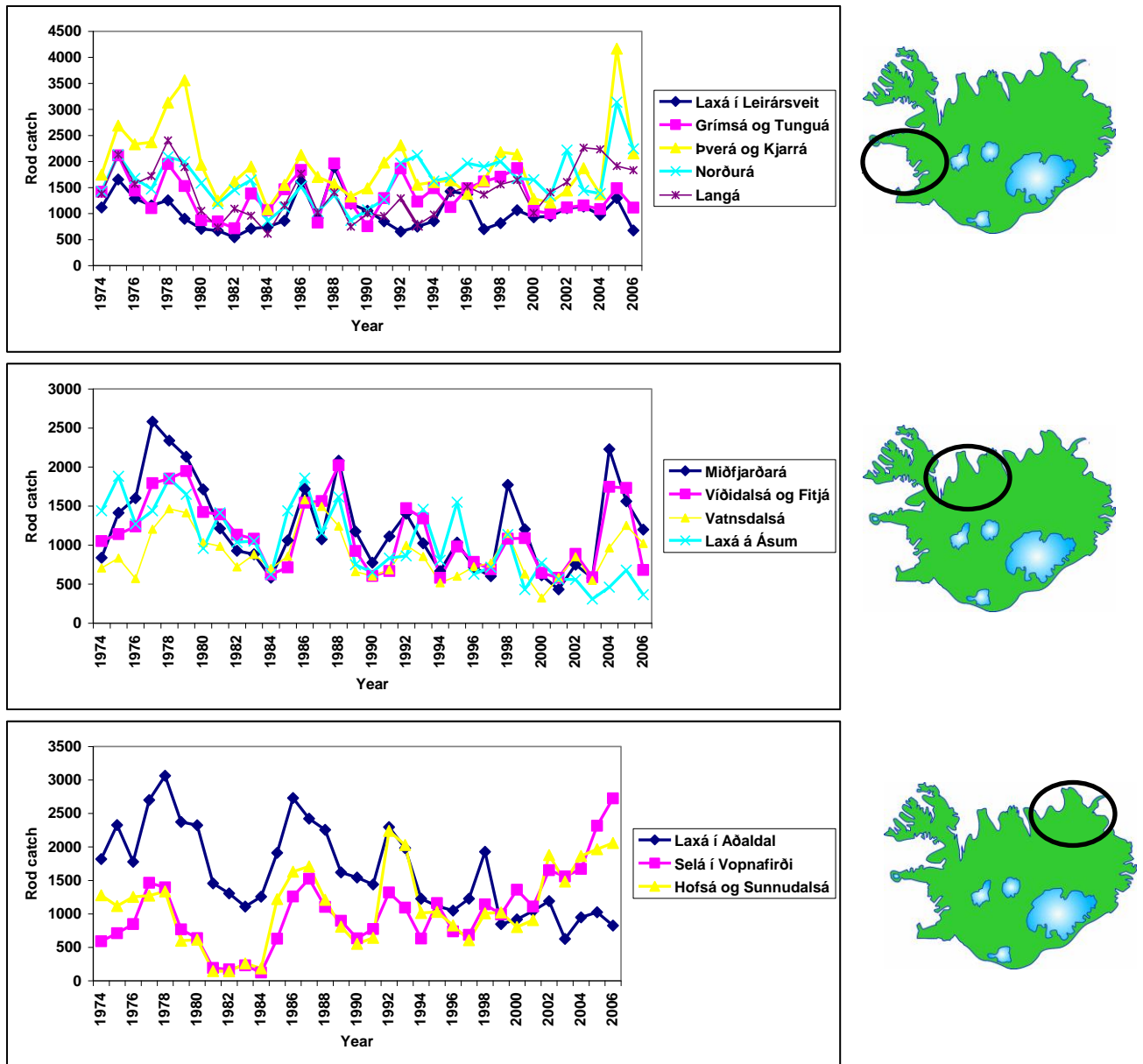
1.3. Salmon rivers

According to NASCO definition salmon rivers should be listed by estuaries. However, when it comes to salmon management, tributaries are considered management units for most Icelandic salmon rivers. Salmon rivers in Iceland are listed in Annex 1 with information on rivers by order. Annex 1 also includes information on stream type, conductivity, pH, length of accessible natural salmon habitat, length of salmon habitat opened up with fish ladders, drainage area and glacier coverage. Information on wetted area if available based on in river assessments as well as estimates on production units. Average catch (max, min) in the period 1974-2007, the number of approved rods and the existence of a net fishery are also shown.

1.4. Estimation of the salmon run

Fluctuations in salmon catches are known to occur within areas in Iceland with higher amplitudes in northern and eastern Iceland than in southern and western Iceland (Figure 1). Where available salmon runs estimated with fish counters show that abundance is significantly reflected by the rod catch. This can be seen for 1SW and 2SW fish. Exploitation rate is on the average close to 50% and 70% for 1SW and 2SW salmon respectively. A 65 year study in the river Elliðaár shows that exploitation rate is slightly lower when the run is high than when it is low. The study also shows that the exploitation rate is not affected by five fold changes in effort (rod days) in that period (Gudbergsson and Antonsson 2008).

The observed connections between salmon run and catch show that salmon catch statistics can to a high degree be regarded to reflect the status of salmon stocks.



Figur 1. Salmon rod catch in Icelandic salmon rivers shown for different areas.

1.5. Salmon production in Icelandic rivers

Icelandic rivers are of different origin although direct runoff rivers are most common (Annex 1). Springfed rivers and rivers draining lakes have much higher production per ha than direct runoff rivers (Figure 2). This needs to be taken into account for the estimate of reference point due to different levels of replacement values. If the freshwater and ocean

mortality is similar for the rivers shown in figure 2 River Elliðaár needs 27 times higher number of eggs per unit area than River Hafnalónsá.

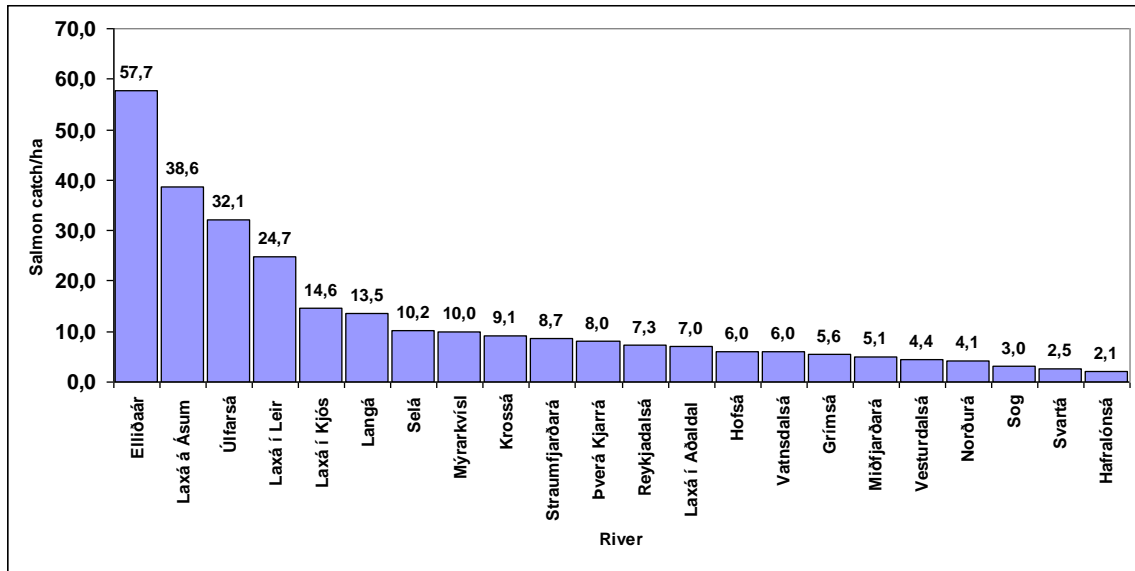


Figure 2. Average salmon catch per ha in Icelandic salmon rivers.

The productivity of Icelandic salmon rivers is also affected by the fact, that only 3 species of salmonids, i.e. salmon, brown trout and char have historically been found in Icelandic rivers, including the sea-run varieties of these species. Most salmon fisheries are thus mono-species or with very limited quantities of other salmonids in specific river sections.

2. Identification of exploited stocks and the reference points (conservation limit and/or management target) or alternative measures used to define adequate abundance of the stock.

All Icelandic salmon rivers (stocks), except the few harvested with gillnets, are exploited through the lease of fishing rights to anglers or angling clubs. The revenue, for the average salmon caught in rod fisheries is 20 – 30 times higher than the revenue for salmon sold in a fish market. The average price of a fishing license is thus strongly related to the average catch per rod. A reduction in catch will lead to lower income for the river owners, angling companies and angling clubs.

Since the fishing rights are leased in an open market system, supply and demand decide the market price. This system stimulates enhancement programs and opening up of impassible river areas, as increased income is used to pay for the investment in fish passages and hatchery reared parr and smolts.

As there is no interannual change in effort and good recording of the catch in log-books, the catch reflects the approximate state of the stock and a poor stock status should be detected.

No information is available on the distribution of salmon, by river of origin, within the Icelandic EEZ as sea-fisheries for salmon are prohibited in those areas. Recoveries of Carlin-tagged as well as coded-wire tagged Icelandic salmon from the Faroes fishery and the West Greenland fishery are available from 1967 through 1995 indicating that Icelandic 2SW salmon are found in those areas (Árni Ísaksson et al, 2002). Salmon from North and East Iceland were recovered to a greater extent in the Faroese long-line fishery while salmon from South and West Iceland were recovered in the West Greenland salmon fishery. Based on these tag recoveries salmon stocks from North and East Iceland are grouped with Northern NEAC stock complex and South and West Iceland with Southern NEAC stock complex. The PFA estimates are therefore calculated separately for these two areas. The PFA estimates, as calculated by the North Atlantic Salmon Working Group, show that the number of spawners has been above the “Conservation limit” in both areas for the past 4 years (ICES 2008). The estimated exploitation rates on the other hand have been decreasing in Iceland due to an increase in “catch and release” in the salmon fisheries.

The production of salmon as catch per ha, shows a wide range for Icelandic rivers (figure 2). This will obviously lead to a wide range of conservation limits. Information on size of the estimated spawning stock in numbers of eggs, wetted area and recruitment is available for 11 Icelandic rivers showing that the number of eggs giving MSY is from 1,8 eggs/m² to 83,3 eggs/m² (table 2).

Table 2. Size of production area for Atlantic salmon, conservation limit based on the number of eggs spawned and densities of 1 and 2 year parr in electrofishing surveys. The attainment of CL is calculated.

River name	Wetted area		Average catch	Catch/ha	Conservation limit MSY eggs/m ²	Spawning requirement Number of eggs	Average no eggs past 5 year average		% of CL
	m ²	Hectar							
Elliðaár	199.711	19,97	1.152	57,68	59,30	11.842.862	2.312.540	19,53	
Laxá á Ásum	274.189	27,42	1.057	38,55	20,40	5.593.456	1.101.538	19,69	
Selá	962.800	96,28	980	10,18	1,40	1.347.920	4.138.897	307,06	
Krossá	114.270	11,43	104	9,10	1,80	205.686	440.850	214,33	
Laxá í Aðaldal	2.369.370	236,94	1.651	6,97	4,30	10.188.291	4.067.776	39,93	
Hofsá	1.792.090	179,21	1.082	6,04	1,00	1.792.090	3.765.653	210,13	
Vatnsdalsá	1.486.643	148,66	887	5,97	1,70	2.527.293	2.167.261	85,75	
Grímsá	2.395.118	239,51	1.345	5,62	3,00	7.185.354	2.447.041	34,06	
Miðfjarðará	2.453.913	245,39	1.243	5,07	1,20	2.944.696	1.980.848	67,27	
Vesturdalsá	495.900	49,59	216	4,36	1,40	694.260	246.925	35,57	
Sog	1.293.500	129,35	390	3,02	7,60	9.830.600	733.290	7,46	

The results indicate that there is high variation for conservation limits for these rivers. Most of the rivers in table 2 are based on direct run-off flow, but the rivers Elliðaár, Laxá á Ásum, Laxá í Aðaldal and Sog are all springfed rivers draining lakes. For the run-off rivers MSY is from 1-3, 0 eggs/m² with 1,6 eggs/m² on the average. The knowledge of wetted area, catch/ha and the origin of the rivers can be used to group Icelandic rivers into categories of CL. This table should, however, be looked at as preliminary results and the actual values for CL as incomplete. It should, however, be pointed out that the above rivers represent well over 10 % of all Icelandic salmon rivers and could possibly be used as indexes for certain areas. The work on setting conservation limits for Icelandic salmon stocks will continue in the years to come.

3. The status of the stock relative to the abundance criteria specified

As presented in table 2, the estimated average number of eggs spawned for the past 5 years are from as low as 8 % of the spawning requirement to a high of 307 %. This indicates that river owners and the “Competent Management Authority” need to refine these techniques and increase their effort in evaluating conservation limits for more salmon rivers.

The value of salmon fisheries is to large extent based on catch. There is thus a heavy competition between rivers for anglers. Setting CLs for Icelandic salmon rivers and using them thus needs to be based on scientifically acknowledged methods as incorrect estimates and resulting regulatory measures can be quite costly for the fishery associations in question.

The salmon catch in Icelandic rivers is faithfully recorded in log-books that the owners are, by law, obliged to keep. This log-book system, which has been under development since 1946, provides recording of almost all salmon caught with related information on catch date, length, weight, sex, beat and bait. As mentioned previously the catch figures can to a large extent be regarded to reflect the status of stocks (Table 3).

From existing data there is no concrete evidence showing that any Icelandic salmon stocks are suffering from inadequate recruitment but certain rivers seem to be close to unacceptable CL levels and need to be watched carefully. The observed problems can almost exclusively be traced to a major decline in the 2-SW component, which is discussed in section 4.

4. The extent to which the stock is meeting other diversity criteria (e.g. age groups, size groups, populations), if such information is available.

In general Icelandic salmon stocks spend 1 or 2 winters at sea. The sea-age groups can be separated by weight where 2-SW females are bigger than 3,5kg and 2-SW males bigger than 4,0 kg. Aging of salmon from scales supports this and shows little overlap between sea-age groups. In the 1970s the number of 1SW and 2SW salmon in the salmon catch reflected the natural composition of the stocks (Figure 3). In the early 1980s there was a decline for both stock components. After 1985 the catch of 1SW salmon improved again but the 2-SW stock component is still declining. Changes in sea-age composition for Icelandic salmon stocks has earlier been detected but not for such a long period (Gudjonsson et al. 1995).

Before 1980 there was a strong relationship between the catch of 1SW fish and 2SW fish in the subsequent year (Scarnecchia 1983). After 1985 the abundance of 2SW salmon has been declining in all Icelandic salmon rivers (Figure 4). This has led to a general request to salmon anglers from the Institute of Freshwater Fisheries, the Federation of River Owners and the Federation of Icelandic Angling Clubs to release all MSW salmon. In 2006 19 % of the 1SW catch were released and 32 % of the MSW salmon.

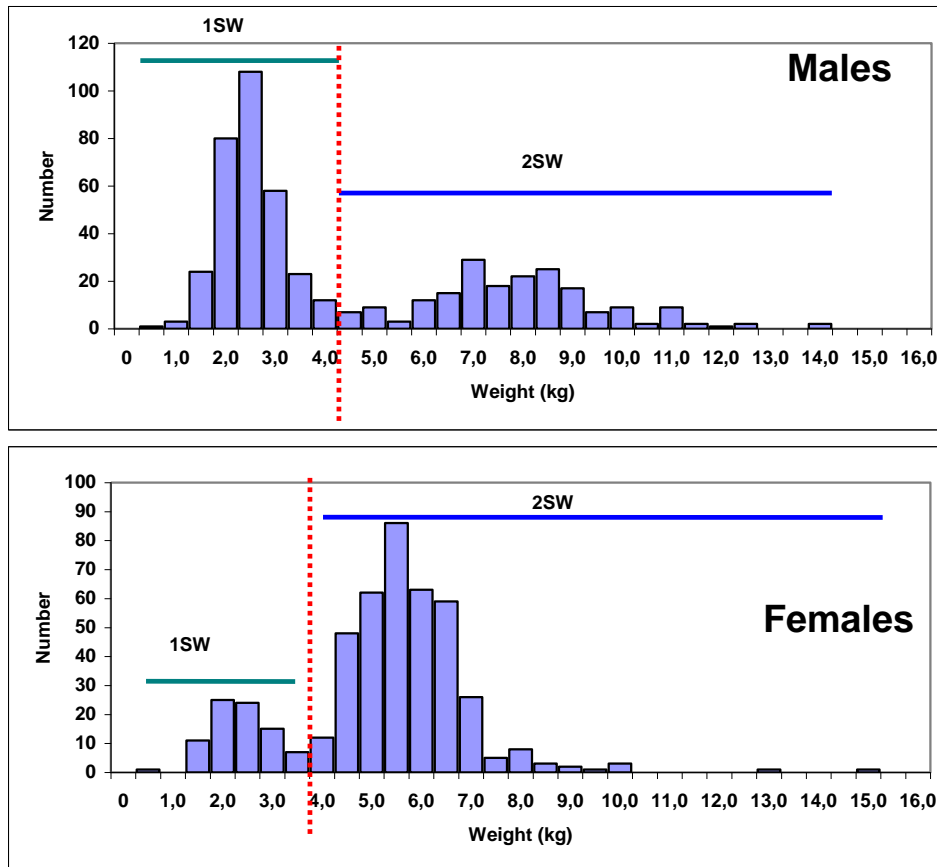


Figure 3. An example of the weight distribution of the salmon catch in River Laxá, North-East Iceland.

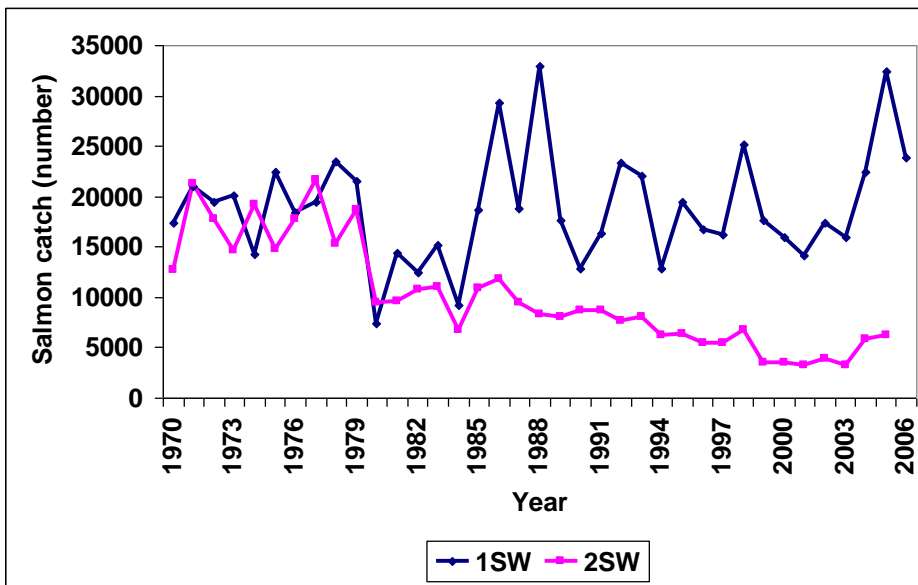


Figure 4. The catch of 1SW and MSW salmon in Icelandic salmon rivers from 1970 – 2006 including 88% of the total salmon catch in Iceland.

5. For mixed stock fisheries, the information in numbers 3 and 4 should be presented for each contributing stock.

At present, legal mixed stock fisheries can only operate in two glacier rivers with salmon production to some extent in the main stem but mostly in clear water tributaries. There are traditional rights of gillnet fisheries in these glacier rivers, which have been severely regulated by laws and regulations for decades.

A mixed stock net fishery only takes place in two glacial rivers on Iceland's south coast, the Ölfusá and Þjórsá, where the salmon spawn partly in clear water tributaries and partly in the glacial streams. The average catch during the past 5 years has been 5.700 salmon which represents approximately 90 % of the Icelandic net catch. In 2007 about half of the number of gillnets in the Ölfusá were leased by angling interests. This development is likely to continue, which will further protect any small stock components in these mixed stock net fisheries in the near future.

As stated earlier there is no legal coastal fishery for salmon in Icelandic waters after a buy-out of the few remaining coastal fisheries in 1996. Gillnet fisheries in lower reaches of Hvítá in Borgarfjörður, where the main salmon production is in clear water tributaries, have since 1991 been leased annually by the river associations in the tributaries. This is economical because of the price difference between salmon caught in net fishery and the much higher price paid for the rod fishery. An assessment of the effect of the netting lease gives that this has increased the catch in the tributaries between 28-32% (Einarsson and Gudbergsson 2003).

6. The management actions that will be employed to control harvest, including measures that will be used to address any failure or trend in abundance or diversity.

In 2006 a new Act on freshwater fisheries was passed by the Icelandic Parliament. This new Act increases the responsibility of Fishery Associations with respect to the management of salmon stock within their jurisdiction under the supervision of the Competent Management Authority. Every Fishery Association needs to make an "Effort Plan" for their fish stock, specifying number of rods, bait or bag limitations or any other measures of salmon conservation. The "Effort Plan" must be approved by the Freshwater Management Division of the Directorate of Fisheries after receiving a comment from the Institute of Freshwater Fisheries. The purpose is to increase the responsibilities of the Fishing Associations as well as to increase their obligations to gather information of the status of stock. Through this process the precautionary principle can be introduced and applied by the "Competent Management Authority". This is also likely to facilitate the process of gathering the basic information needed to determine Conservation Limits. At least in the long run keeping the salmon stock level above CL that is based on maximum sustainable yield (MSY) will be highly beneficial for the fishing right owners.

The "Competent Management Authority" can thus request a modification of an Effort Plan" in a river where CLs indicate that a stock is threatened. If the Fisheries Association fails to react there are emergency measures embedded in the new Act which can be enacted unilaterally by the "Competent Management Authority".

7. The extent to which the following issues are taken into account:

7.1. Uncertainty in the assessments.

As mentioned previously the CLs which are currently available for selected rivers probably have high confidence limits. The confidence in those values will probably increase with more experience in estimating CL's. It must, however, always be the primary objective to conserve the salmon stocks in line with the "Precautionary Approach" where lack of sufficient information does not lead to non-action, if other evidence suggests that there is a problem.

7.2. Abundance of the stock/diversity of the stock.

The abundance and diversity of the salmon stocks are clearly key issues in any management plan. Catch and release has been practiced in many Icelandic rivers for a number of years and anglers have been encouraged to release all 2-SW salmon for the last 4 years. All angled salmon are released in one river and most rivers have specific limits in the number of salmon retained per day. Bait limitation is also quite common and fly fishing is getting to be the primary angling method. All the above issues are quite important elements of the mandatory "Effort Plan".

7.3. Selectivity of the fisheries.

The only selective fisheries in Iceland would be the remaining in-river net fisheries, which partly are harvesting salmon, which would not be harvested by any other means. There is anecdotal evidence that different forms of bait would be harvesting different age classes of salmon but this needs to be confirmed.

7.4. Any non-fishery factors affecting the stock.

There are a number of factors e.g. of environmental origin which may affect the stocks in Icelandic rivers. Salmon fishing is highly dependent on good water flow and favourable conditions during the fishing season. Low water and high temperatures may decrease wetted areas and reduce the salmon habitat and increase the danger of disease outbreaks. Man-made threats are easier to avert due to the high value of the salmon fishing and fishery associations are eager to protect the rivers from pollution, gravel mining activity as well as hydropower development, which has been minimal on salmon rivers.

7.5. Other fisheries exploiting the stock.

The information about other fisheries e.g. for marine species harvesting Icelandic salmon are anecdotal in nature and this information can not be quantified. Same is true for coastal net fisheries for char. As there are no coastal sea-fisheries targeting salmon the overall effects on the salmon stocks just prior to freshwater entry are probably minimal.

8. The expected extent and timescale of effects.

A successful development of CLs for all Icelandic rivers will take some time since this is based on several actions including legal actions and costly surveys of salmon rivers, which mostly will be financed by the respective Fishery Associations. This gathering of physical and basic biological datasets also takes time. It is thus probably realistic to aim for a timeframe of 5-10 years before the proper management tools for the most valuable salmon rivers have been developed. It seems likely that the progress in minor salmon rivers will be considerably slower.

9. An explanation of how socio-economic factors are applied in the development of fisheries management actions and how this affects the attainment of NASCO's goals.

The Icelandic angling fisheries are driven by economical factors. In many cases an angling club or outfitter pays a fixed annual price for the river for a period up to 5-10 years. This contract assumes that the river is entitled to a certain number of rods for angling, which are marketed up to a year or two in advance of the fishing season. This system clearly puts considerable strain on any day to day management and is probably the best example of the influence of socioeconomic factors on salmon management in Iceland.

Another example of socio-economic factors is the lease of netting rights to anglers and environmental groups in order to enhance angling in upstream tributaries. This of course is facilitated by the great value difference between angled and net-caught salmon. This trend is likely to continue.

Since the angling fisheries are in fact limited entry fisheries and the fisheries associations and angling clubs can manipulate the effort through "catch and release" as well as bait and bag limitations it does not seem likely that these factors are affecting the attainment of NASCO goals with respect to salmon conservation.

10. Programs that will be used to monitor the effect of the management measures and identify information deficiencies and timeframe resolution.

The efficient collection of angling statistics throughout the salmon season provides an excellent platform for estimating run sizes into individual rivers, as the salmon statistics have been shown to reflect the run size to a great extent. There are plans to record statistics on-line in certain selected rivers, which will speed up the gathering of the statistics. If runs seem to be dangerously low the "Competent Management Authority" is enabled to instruct the Fisheries Association on the river to enact some conservation measures, probably through a change in the "Effort plan". In extremely serious circumstances emergency measures could be introduced for the following year or years in close cooperation with the River (Fisheries) Association on the relevant river.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the Icelandic Salmon Management System, which has its roots in a Salmonid Fisheries Act set in 1932 has been relatively efficient in preserving the salmon stocks. The major pillars of this development are the following:

1. A total ban on any coastal fisheries for salmon.
2. Severely restricted terminal fisheries in freshwater (rod + nets).
3. Fixed maximum number of rods on all salmon rivers.
4. Very accurate catch statistics for all angling and most netting fisheries.
5. Fixed number of netting engines on some glacial rivers with restricted fishing effort.
6. Lease of netting engines in freshwater in areas where such an act can benefit angling.
7. Considerable limitation in the use of bait and the number of retained salmon.
8. Voluntary “catch and release”

Despite this the Icelandic salmon fisheries have been subject to a declining marine survival of 2-SW salmon in many areas, which poses great challenges for Fisheries Associations as well as the Salmon Management Authorities.

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Annex 1. Some key information regarding Icelandic salmon rivers.

Annex 1. (continued)

River	1st Order Tributary	2nd order Tributary	3rd order Tributary	River Type	Conductivity $\mu\text{S/cm}$	pH	Length km	Length open km	Catchment area km ²	Glacier km ²	Wetted area m ²	Production units	Average catch	Max catch	Min catch	Average catch ha	Fishing method Rod	Number of rods	Fishing method nets	Recording log-book	Counter installed	Counting period	Exploitation %	
1	Breiðdalsá			D	57		10	23	370				1				1	8		1	1	2004		
		Tinnudalsá		D	26				151				184	815	4		1							
1	Geithellnaá			D	28				184				+				1							
1	Laxá í Nesjum			D	80				55				75	202	8		1				1			
1	Skaftá			J+L+D	69		52		3000				5	13	0		1			1	1			
		Fossálar		D	55		15						+				1				1			
		Geirlandsá		D	53		22						51	162	12		1	2		1	1			
			Stjórn þverá	D	72		1		36				+				1				1			
				L+S	59		1						+				1				1			
		Hörgsá á Síðu Fjaðrá		D	50		10		40				12	20	9		1				1			
				D	75		2		35				+				1				1			
1	Grenlækur			L	112		30						5	20	0		1				1	1	1998	
1	Eldvatn í Meðallandi			L	113		26						16	51	3		1				1			
1	Kúðafliót			D			33		182				+				1			1	1			
		Tungufliót		D	76		9						27	74	8		1	6			1			
1	Kerlingardalsá			J+D+L	103		12		93	22			71	169	16		1				1			
		Vatnsá		S+D+L	103		2		20				+				1				1			
		Heiðarvatn		S									+				1				1			
1	Skógaá			D+L	56				78	3			+				1				1			
1	Markarfljót			J+D+L	105				1200	240			+				1				1			
		Seljalandsá		L					11				+				1				1			
1	Affall, A-Landeyjum			L									+				1				1			
1	Hólsá			L					1860				+				1				1			
		Ytri-Rangá þverá		L	177		17	51	1000				+				1	10			1	1	2000	
				L	178				784	8			+				1	14			1			
			Eystri-Rangá	L	101	8,5	28		562	8			+				1	13			1			
1	Þjórská			D+J+L	83		48	57	7530	1010			N1950	5532	784		1			1	1	1	1997	
		Minnivallarlækur		L	99								+				1				1			
		Kálfá		D	95		11		85				45	130	2		1	2			1			
		Fossá þverá		D+L					223				+				1				1			
				D									+				1				1			
1	Ölfusá			L+D+J+L	75				6100	620			N3458	7415	1186		1	14		1	1			
													S350	825	6		1				1			
		Þorleifslækur		D+L	208		13		115				+				1	8			1			
		Sog		L+S	75		8		1200		1293500	11849	390	714	223	3,02	1	6			1			
			Ásgarðslækur		95								20				1	1			1			
			Tunguá	D+L									+				1				1			
		Hvítá		L+D+J	62		69		4500	620			N2761	8480	1215		1	22		1	1			
													S708	1169	190		1				1			
			Brúará	L	56		19		225				49	92	14		1				1			
				L+S					278				+				1				1			
			Hagaós	L+S	81								+				1				1			
			Hólaá	L+S									+				1				1			
			Fullsæll	D+L									+				1				1			
				L+J	51		11		770	250			+				1	2			1	1	2007	
		Tungufliót											+				1				1			
		Höskuldslækur											20				1	2			1	1	2007	
		Litla-Laxá		D	83				105				300	707	76		1	10			1			
		Stóra-Laxá		D	53		37		512				+				1	1			1			
		Dalsá		D					31				+				1				1			
		Fossá		D					30				+				1	1			1			
1	Hróarsholtslækur			L			15	16,5					22	59	8		1				1			