

NEA(16)11

Report of the Thirty-Third Annual Meeting of the North-East Atlantic Commission of the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization

Steigenberger Hotel, Bad Neuenahr-Ahrweiler, Germany

7 - 10 June 2016

1. Opening of the Meeting

- 1.1 The Chairman, Dr Ciaran Byrne (European Union), opened the meeting and welcomed participants to the Thirty-Third Annual Meeting of the Commission. He noted that last year the Commission had adopted a multi-annual decision relating to the salmon fishery at the Faroe Islands. He recognised this continuing commitment to salmon conservation by the Faroe Islands in refraining from fishing for salmon in response to the scientific advice. The continuation of that decision for 2016/17 was conditional on the application of a Framework of Indicators and, while this showed that re-assessment of the multi-annual advice was warranted, the latest advice again indicated that there were no harvest options at Faroes in 2016/17 or 2017/18. He indicated that the Commission need not, therefore, negotiate a new decision but that there were other important items on the Agenda, not least consideration of the threat posed by the parasite *Gyrodactylus salaris*.
- 1.2 A written Opening Statement on behalf of the Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) attending the Annual Meeting was distributed (Annex 1).
- 1.3 A list of participants at the Thirty-Third Annual Meetings of the Council and Commissions of NASCO is included on page **xx** of this document.

2. Adoption of the Agenda

- 2.1 The Commission adopted its Agenda, NEA(16)8 (Annex 2).

3. Nomination of a Rapporteur

- 3.1 Mr Helge Lorentzen (Norway) was appointed as Rapporteur for the meeting.

4. Election of Officers

- 4.1 The Commission re-elected Dr Ciaran Byrne (European Union) as its Chairman and elected Mr Victor Rozhnov (Russian Federation) as its Vice-Chairman.

5. Review of the 2015 Fishery and ACOM Report from ICES on Salmon Stocks in the Commission Area

- 5.1 The representative of ICES, Dr Jonathan White, presented the scientific advice on salmon stocks relevant to the North-East Atlantic Commission, CNL(16)9. The presentation is available as document NEA(16)10. The Advisory Committee (ACOM) report from ICES, which contains the scientific advice relevant to all Commissions, is included on page **XX** of this document.
- 5.2 The representative of the European Union noted that there was information relating to by-catch of salmon around Iceland in the ICES presentation which was not contained in the ACOM report. The representative of ICES indicated that information had been presented in the ACOM report on 'New opportunities for sampling salmon at sea' which referred to by-catch in research surveys, but the information presented related to by-catch in commercial fisheries. He indicated that he had used information contained in the report of the Working Group on North Atlantic Salmon (WGNAS) and would ensure that future presentations were based only on the ACOM report.
- 5.3 The representative of the NGOs asked if ICES had received any reports of by-catch in the blue whiting fisheries, as anecdotal information suggested this could be substantial. The representative of ICES indicated that other Working Groups within the ICES community are requested to provide information to the WGNAS on by-catch of salmon, but he would follow up on this.

6. Mixed-Stock Fisheries conducted by Members of the Commission

- 6.1 Under the Council's 'Action Plan for taking forward the recommendations of the External Performance Review and the Review of the 'Next Steps' for NASCO', CNL(13)38, it was agreed that there should be agenda items in each of the Commissions to allow for a focus on mixed-stock fisheries (MSFs).
- 6.2 The European Union, NEA(16)4 (Annex 3), Norway, NEA(16)5 (Annex 4) and the Russian Federation, NEA(16)7 (Annex 5) tabled papers providing an update on the information on MSFs contained in the 2013 - 2018 Implementation Plans, including a description of any MSFs still operating, the most recent catch data, and any changes or developments in the management of MSFs to implement NASCO's agreements.
- 6.3 The representative of the European Union presented paper NEA(16)4, describing recent developments in mixed-stock fisheries for European Union - Ireland, European Union - Sweden, European Union - Finland, European Union - UK (England and Wales) and European Union - UK (Scotland). In particular, she highlighted the measures taken by Sweden in 2014 and by Scotland in 2016 to phase out mixed-stock fisheries in coastal waters.
- 6.4 The representative of Norway indicated that in several Norwegian fjords and coastal regions, mixed-stock fisheries have not been permitted for many years due to low Management Target attainment. However, restricted mixed-stock fisheries are still operating in most fjords and along the coast. During the revision of the regulations for 2016 and onwards, the mixed-stock fisheries were further restricted in specific areas in western, central and northern Norway. The fishing season was extended in

two minor fjord areas in parts of western Norway, due to improvement of stock status in these areas. He indicated that in Northern Norway, further restrictions were adopted. A reduction of fishing days for bend nets will come into force in the Varanger fjord from 2016, and corresponding regulations for the coastal region and the Tana fjord will come into force when a new agreement for the river Tana is put into effect. The total catch in the coastal net fisheries in 2015 was 233 tonnes, an increase of 9% from 2014. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) concerning cooperation on management and monitoring of, and research on, wild salmon stocks in Finnmark County and the Murmansk region was signed by Norway and the Russian Federation in Autumn 2015. A Working Group was established and met in November 2015 and again in April 2016. He reported that the Group has agreed to initially focus on work related to fisheries regulations, and has exchanged more detailed information on stock status, the current management regime and regulatory measures. Some areas for possible closer scientific cooperation have been identified. The work has already contributed to a better mutual understanding of salmon issues and management challenges. The first annual report from the Group is intended to be released by the end of this year. The new measures introduced for the Varanger fjord fisheries in 2016, as mentioned above, are expected to reduce catches of salmon originating from Russian rivers.

- 6.5 The representative of the Russian Federation indicated that the Russian Federation welcomes the new management measures for salmon mixed-stock fisheries introduced by Norway in 2016. He indicated that the Russian Federation believes that the new regulatory measures will help to minimise interceptory harvests in the area of fisheries jurisdiction of one Party of salmon originating in the rivers of another Party. However, the Russian Federation would again like to bring mixed-stock fisheries in Northern Norway to the attention of Members of the Commission and Council. The results of the Kolarctic salmon project presented at the Theme-based Special Session of the Council of NASCO in 2014 showed that the proportion of salmon of Russian origin harvested in Finnmark County, Norway, made up 18% of the total catch. Proportions of wild salmon originating from different regions showed remarkable differences in catches between municipalities. He stated that salmon of Russian origin made up 65% of the total catch taken in the Sør-Varanger municipality, with the highest proportion occurring at the beginning of the fishing season in June. Taking into account that the total Norwegian catch in the coastal net fisheries in 2015 was 233 tonnes, an increase of 9% from 2014 and of 21% from 2013, the Russian Federation urges Norway again to further restrict the interceptory mixed-stock fisheries in its northern coastal areas and adopt more restrictive regulations than those currently implemented.
- 6.6 The representative of Norway referred to negotiations between Finland and Norway for the Tana. As reported in the Annual Progress Reports, the negotiations are on-going and have been for a number of years. After meetings, including at a political level, at which the main elements of a new agreement were resolved, Norway had hoped to conclude the negotiations at a final meeting held last month but Finland had withdrawn some basic elements which were previously agreed, leaving little hope that a new agreement will be in place in 2017. The negotiations are on-going, but Norway is preparing new measures for the Norwegian part of the river to come into effect no later than 2018.

- 6.7 The EU delegate representing Finland indicated that Finland found it unfortunate that a conclusion to the complex negotiations had not been reached. It is a complex issue with many different stakeholders with different fishing rights. The negotiations have been on-going for several years and although time is now limited, Finland hopes to continue the talks and find agreement to take the measures forward. However, if this is not possible, then national measures will be introduced but this is seen as a secondary option.

7. Development of a Risk Framework for the Faroese Fishery

- 7.1 The Commission had previously discussed the possible development of a Risk Framework for the Faroese fishery. The representative of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) indicated that she was not in a position to further discuss the development of a Risk Framework and that she would prefer to have substantive discussions on this topic at the 2017 Annual Meeting.

8. Regulatory Measures

- 8.1 At its Thirty-Second (2015) Annual Meeting, the Commission adopted a Decision regarding the salmon fishery in Faroese waters in 2015/16, 2016/17 and 2017/18 (NEA(15)10). Under this Decision, the Commission decided not to set a quota for the salmon fishery in the Faroese Fisheries Zone for 2015/16, acknowledging that Faroese management decisions will be made with due consideration to the ICES advice concerning the biological situation and the status of the stocks contributing to the fishery. The decision would also apply in 2016/17 and 2017/18 unless the application of the Framework of Indicators (FWI) showed that a re-assessment was warranted. The Commission had agreed that the procedure for applying the FWI that was used previously should continue under the new Decision.
- 8.2 The report of FWI Working Group, NEA(16)3, was presented by its Chairman, Mr Ian Russell (European Union). The Working Group had concluded that the results of the NEAC FWI assessment in 2016 (based on indicator values for 2015) were consistent with the previous PFA forecast for 2015 for two of the four stock complexes. For one stock complex (Southern NEAC 1SW salmon), the FWI suggested that the forecast of PFA was an over-estimate which does not trigger a re-assessment when the Faroes fishery is closed (NASCO agreement NEA(13)11). However, for Northern NEAC MSW salmon, the FWI suggested that the forecast of PFA for this stock complex was an under-estimate and that a re-assessment was appropriate. Therefore, the FWI Working Group concluded that a re-assessment of the existing management advice for the Faroes fishery was required from ICES in 2016. Accordingly, ICES had been requested to provide catch options or alternative management advice for the 2016/17-2018/19 fishing seasons, with an assessment of risks relative to the objective of exceeding stock conservation limits, or pre-defined NASCO Management Objectives, and advise on the implications of these options for stock rebuilding. ICES had also been requested to update the Framework of Indicators used to identify any significant change in the previously provided multi-annual management advice.

8.3 The advice from ICES indicates that in the absence of any fisheries in the fishing seasons 2016/2017 to 2018/2019, there is a less than 95% probability of meeting the spawner escapement reserves for the two age groups (potential 1-sea-winter (1SW) and multi-sea-winter (MSW) spawners) of the Southern NEAC stock complex. Therefore, in the absence of specific management objectives, ICES advises that there are no mixed-stock fisheries options on the NEAC complexes at the Faroes in the fishing seasons 2016/2017 to 2018/2019. The Decision adopted in 2015 will, therefore, continue to apply to the fishery in 2016/17. It will also apply in 2017/18 unless the application of the Framework of Indicators (FWI) shows that a re-assessment is warranted. The Commission agreed the FWI as updated by ICES, and based only on southern NEAC stock complexes, which will be applied by a Working Group in January 2017.

9. Risk of Transmission of *Gyrodactylus salaris* in the Commission Area

9.1 The representative of Norway indicated that the situation with regard to treatment of the parasite in Norway was a success story and that progress made is according to the national Action Plan. Over the last year there had been significant activity and the parasite has now been eradicated from many important salmon rivers. New methods to eradicate the parasite have been developed and employed successfully and if the progress continues, only 7 out of 49 rivers will remain infected by the end of 2016.

9.2 The representative of the European Union referred to the update given by European Union - Sweden in their Annual Progress Report, CNL(16)32.

9.3 In 2004, the Commission had agreed a 'Road Map' for taking forward the recommendations relating to the parasite *G. salaris*. In accordance with this 'Road Map', Working Group meetings had been held in 2006 and 2007. There have been no meetings of the Working Group since 2007, but an item has been included on the NEAC Agenda since then to allow for progress reports from the Parties and, in addition, information is sought in the Implementation Plan template on measures taken to prevent the introduction or further spread of the parasite. Last year, the Commission asked that the Secretary prepare a background document on the 'Road Map' and reporting arrangements in relation to *G. salaris* for consideration at the 2016 Annual Meeting. The Secretary introduced document NEA(16)6 (Annex 6). In view of the serious threat posed by the parasite, the Commission agreed to reconvene its Working Group, under the Chairmanship of Mr Stian Johnsen (Norway), to meet for two days prior to the 2017 Annual Meeting. The Commission asked that the Secretary liaise with the Working Group's Chairman on the arrangements. The Working Group is asked to undertake the following tasks:

- provide a forum for exchange of information among the Parties/ jurisdictions on research on, and monitoring and control programmes for, the parasite *G. salaris*;
- review progress in relation to the Commission's 'Road Map' and advise of any changes required;
- develop recommendations for enhanced cooperation on measures to prevent the further spread of the parasite and for its eradication in areas where it has been introduced; and
- develop recommendations for future research.

- 9.4 It was noted that previous meetings of the Working Group had included representatives of the Parties, NGOs and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) and the ICES Working Group on Pathogens and Diseases of Marine Organisms.

10. Announcement of the Tag Return Incentive Scheme Prize

- 10.1 The Chairman announced that the winner of the North-East Atlantic Commission \$1,500 prize in the NASCO Tag Return Incentive Scheme was Mr Andrey Fedorov, Saint Petersburg, Russian Federation. The winning tag had been applied to a 3.5kg 2SW over-wintered autumn run female salmon on the Clough Creek beat of the Ponoï River on 16 June 2015. It was recaptured on the Falls Creek beat of the Ponoï River on 2 July 2015, about 10km downstream from the place of tagging and subsequently released. The Commission offered its congratulations to the winner.

11. Recommendations to the Council on the Request to ICES for Scientific Advice

- 11.1 The Commission agreed that the request for scientific advice from ICES prepared by the Standing Scientific Committee in relation to the North-East Atlantic Commission area should be considered by the Council. The request to ICES, as agreed by the Council, is contained in document CNL(16)12 (Annex 7).

12. Other Business

- 12.1 There was no other business.

13. Date and Place of the Next Meeting

- 13.1 The Commission agreed to hold its next meeting during the Thirty-Fourth Annual Meeting of the Council.

14. Report of the Meeting

- 14.1 The Commission agreed a report of its meeting.

Note: The annexes mentioned above begin on page **XX**, following the French translation of the report of the meeting. A list of North-East Atlantic Commission papers is included in Annex 8.