

## WGCIS(17)14

### *Report of the Inter-Sessional Meeting of the West Greenland Commission of the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization*

*Varbergs Kusthotell, Varberg, Sweden*

*4 June 2017*

#### **1. Opening of the Meeting**

- 1.1 The Chairman of the West Greenland Commission, Mr Carl McLean (Canada), opened the meeting and welcomed participants to Varberg. He referred to extreme events, particularly in the high Arctic, where climate change effects are most noticeable. He referred to the importance of food security issues facing indigenous peoples and the importance of both aquatic and terrestrial resources including salmon. He noted that the Commission's work would involve: reviewing events in the fishery at Greenland in 2016, for which a quota of 32 tonnes was set following exceedance of the agreed 45 tonne quota in 2015; reviewing progress in implementing monitoring and control measures in the salmon fishery at Greenland; reviewing the results of the self-assessments using the six tenets for effective management of an Atlantic salmon fishery; and considering other elements of the regulatory measure. He commended Greenland for its efforts since the 2016 Annual Meeting and for the transparent way in which the Commission has been kept advised. He noted that the Commission's work takes place against a background of continuing low abundance of salmon stocks, but he anticipated that the excellent spirit of co-operation that characterises the work of the West Greenland Commission would stand the Commission in good stead and enable it to build upon the progress that has been made over the last two years.
- 1.2 A written Opening Statement was tabled by the United States (Annex 1).
- 1.3 A list of participants is attached as Annex 2.

#### **2. Adoption of the Agenda**

- 2.1 The Commission adopted its Agenda, WGCIS(17)13 (Annex 3).

#### **3. Nomination of a Rapporteur**

- 3.1 Dr Michael Millane (European Union) was appointed Rapporteur for the meeting.

#### **4. Review of the Multi-Annual Regulatory Measure for Fishing for Salmon at West Greenland for 2015, 2016 and 2017, WGC(15)21**

In 2015, the Commission adopted a Multi-Annual Regulatory Measure for Fishing for Salmon at West Greenland for 2015, 2016 and 2017, WGC(15)21, (Annex 4). Last year, the Commission had agreed to convene an Inter-sessional Meeting at which it would review implementation of that measure. Details of the proposed management

measures for the 2016 fishery were issued to all Members of the Commission on 19 August 2016. The report on the fishery contained in WGCIS(17)7 (Annex 5) was provided to the Secretariat on 6 April 2017.

**4.1 Report on the West Greenland Salmon Fishery in 2016 (*sub-paragraphs 1 and 2 of WGC(15)21*)**

4.1.1 The representative of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) provided a brief overview of the Greenland salmon fishery in 2016. He indicated that the management measures implemented before the 2015 fishery had continued in the 2016 fishery. Following overfishing in 2015, the quota was set at 32 tonnes for the 2016 fishery. The quota uptake, based on received reports, was approximately 27 tonnes, which represented around half of the reported landings in 2015. The Executive Order setting a shorter fishing season continued and, as in 2015, the 2016 salmon fishery ran from 15 August - 31 October. Factory landings were not permitted in the 2016 salmon fishery. This likely represented an important element in the reduction in fishery catches. The export ban remained in force.

4.1.2 The respective representatives of each Party thanked and acknowledged Greenland for their efforts in managing the 2016 salmon fishery. The representative of the United States noted with pleasure that the quota was not exceeded and that additional steps had been taken to better control and monitor the fishery. The representative of the European Union was encouraged by the reduction in the fishing season and offered assistance to Greenland to address areas where there may be difficulties in enforcing regulatory measures. The representative of Canada was encouraged that there were no factory landings in 2016 and indicated that she looked forward to hearing about Greenland's plans for the coming year.

4.1.3 The Chairman informed the Commission that following distribution of document WGCIS(17)7, a short list of questions from the Parties had been sent to Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland). These questions (in italics) and the responses provided are shown below:

***Canada***

*1. Why has the measure related to failure to provide a catch report (even when zero) not been implemented? Any additional information on this and plans for implementation in future years would be appreciated.*

4.1.4 The representative of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) noted that the management and regulatory issues raised must be perceived from a political and cultural perspective, further noting that the salmon fishery is an intrinsic part of life in Greenland for coastal communities and a relatively small component of all inshore fisheries that occur there. Therefore, the focus of the authorities is to place high importance on ensuring that inshore fishermen are reasonably facilitated and not subject to strict consequences for the non-reporting of catches. The representative of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) noted that work is underway to revise relevant fisheries legislation in order to introduce a more efficient licensing process for fishermen. This has notably included a proposal to decentralise the licensing process from central government to the respective municipalities if related legal and

administrative complexities can be adequately addressed. At the present time, parts of the licensing system have already been introduced and implementation is ongoing. However, no set timeframe is currently in place for the full introduction and implementation of this new licensing system. In addition, corrections during the implementation process may be expected as well as legal adjustments. It was noted that although the municipalities would administer the proposed new licensing system, licences would still be issued by the central authority. It is intended that licence applications made through the new system will be validated to ensure that licence criteria set out in the relevant legislation are fulfilled. It was suggested that the proposed changes to the licensing process may reduce the work currently undertaken to validate catches and could negate the necessity for the phone surveys as the new system could have the potential to more readily record catch information.

- 4.1.5 The representative of the NGOs asked for clarification as to why issuing of licences by the municipalities would negate the need for phone surveys. The representative of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) responded that if there was a regulation that failure to report catches would result in no licence being issued for the following year, there would be no need for a phone survey. He indicated that the transfer of licensing to the municipalities was to provide better service to fishers.
- 4.1.6 The representative of the United States commended Greenland's efforts to work on catch accountability and acknowledged the wider challenges faced in this regard for many fisheries. He reiterated the importance of providing incentives such as the denial of licence renewals for the non-reporting of catches, the ultimate aim of which is to better manage and conserve the fishery resource.

2. *The report indicates that efforts to ensure proper reporting from open air markets continued. A bit more information on the successes and challenges of this effort would be helpful.*

- 4.1.7 The representative of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) indicated that significant efforts of GFLK to inform municipalities, market administrators and fishermen of their reporting obligations have continued in 2016. This has resulted in an increase in the reporting of catches. However, there have been instances where the same catch has been concurrently reported from different sources (fishermen, open-air markets and municipalities) and this has required further validation to ensure that catch figures are correct.

### ***United States***

*The United States appreciates the efforts undertaken again this year by Greenland to better monitor and control its Atlantic salmon fishery. We are encouraged that reported landings (27 mt) were below the 32 mt quota established for the 2016 fishery. We also note that landings to factories were not allowed in 2016, which we view as a positive step. With regard to the fishery, we have the following questions:*

1. *Greenland notes in its report that it continues to seek improvements to the catch reporting process. Can Greenland provide additional information on the*

*approaches it has implemented and is considering implementing to improve reporting? As part of your response, we would appreciate additional information on the current status of, and considerations regarding, implementation of a provision stating that failure to submit catch reports, including for zero catches, will result in no license being issued in the following year(s).*

4.1.8 The representative of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) addressed this question in his response to question 1 raised by Canada. In addition, he indicated that information collated by the new licensing system could facilitate the non-renewal of licences in the case of non-reporting if this regulation was ever adopted.

4.1.9 The representative of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) responded that the principal focus is on resolving administrative and legal issues with the development of the new licensing process, as well as on efforts to communicate the reporting requirements to the fishing community. He reiterated that substantial efforts have been made in implementing the existing regulatory measures adopted. He confirmed that there has been no licence renewals denied to date due to a failure to report catches.

*2. It is not clear from the report if a phone survey was conducted again this year. As such, we would appreciate any information on how Greenland has confirmed that the reporting provided represents full reporting and accounting of harvest.*

4.1.10 The representative of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) confirmed that a phone survey was undertaken in 2016 to validate catches. The representative of the United States noted that ICES recommended that a more standardised approach to the validation of catches through the phone survey should be implemented to better ensure scientifically robust reporting and offer to support and assist Greenland in this regard was extended by the United States.

*3. When does Greenland expect the licensing of private fishermen to begin? If the task of issuing licenses to private fishermen is delegated to municipalities as indicated in the report, what structural arrangement will be implemented to allow the Government of Greenland to know how many such licenses are issued each year and ensure catch reports from these licensed private fishermen are provided as required?*

4.1.11 The representative of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) highlighted the difficulties in systemically licensing private fishermen. Such fishing is typically small-scale, commonplace throughout communities in Greenland with a high proportion of the population potentially involved. Therefore, it is not easy to clearly define the pool of participants in the West Greenland fishery. He noted that it is more practical to focus efforts on how to reduce the overall catch, for example through the cessation of factory landings. It was further noted that the significant reduction in total catch in 2016 from 2015 may, in part, be a result of a shift in focus to other fish species, notably cod and Greenland halibut, particularly in the northern parts of the country. The representative of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) considered that this changing trend may further reduce fishing pressure on salmon stocks over the short to medium term and is likely dependent on continuation of the recent increase in the cod inshore fishery and increased market price for Greenland

halibut.

- 4.1.12 The representative of the United States and the representative of the NGOs highlighted the importance of accurately establishing the pool of participants involved in the private non-licensed fishery in order to generate more reliable catch information. In addition, the representative of the United States noted that information provided on awareness initiatives and the effectiveness and prevalence of enforcement measures are essential to effectively monitor and manage the salmon fishery in Greenland and achieve full catch accountability. It was further noted that these are important components to consider for the six tenets assessment. In response, the representative of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) reiterated the challenges faced regarding reporting of catches by this group of fishermen where consideration must be given to the cultural context the fishery operates in. He also noted that some considerations were being given in Greenland to developing an internet application to assist with reporting. However, he stressed that, although desirable, there are logistical and technical difficulties in reporting catches using such an approach, including where internet access is often limited, prohibitively expensive or non-existent, particularly in isolated communities.
- 4.1.13 The representative of the European Union observed that when comparing the number of reports submitted for the 2015 and 2016 fishing seasons there was a reduction in the total number from approx. 1100 to 500 which seemed consistent with the reduction of the total catch. However, the number of reports from unlicensed fisherman remained stable at around 200. The representative of the European Union asked whether the representative of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) had any information about how volatile this particular component of the pool of participants could be. The representative of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) indicated that it was possible to check this but at this stage the information was not available.
- 4.1.14 The representative of the NGOs noted that landings by non-licensed private fishermen may make up a significant proportion of the total catch in Greenland with catches in the region of 8 tonnes per year. He enquired as to whether hunters are licensed in Greenland and, if so, why private salmon fishermen are not licensed. The representative of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) confirmed that hunting for muskox and reindeer is licensed in Greenland. However, this is administered by a different government division and is not applicable to salmon.
- 4.1.15 The representative of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) indicated that it was very likely that the two-hundred fishermen who respectively registered catches in 2015 and 2016 were from the same pool of participants. However, this would have to be confirmed with reference to the relevant database.
- 4.1.16 The representative of the European Union asked the representative of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) whether any progress was achieved in relation to one of the provisions of WGC(20)15 which is embedded in the current regulatory measure for the Atlantic salmon fishery in Greenland, according to which the Ministry of Fisheries, Hunting and Agriculture would "evaluate and report on the costs and benefits of conducting a pilot carcass tagging project". The representative of the European Union also indicated that it remained available for offering expertise and

assistance on this issue. The representative of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) indicated that they would further examine this provision.

**4.2 Progress in Implementing the Updated Plan for Implementation of Monitoring and Control Measures in the Salmon Fishery at West Greenland (*sub-paragraph 5 of WGC(15)21*)**

4.2.1 Further to the relevant items reported under Section 4.1, the representative of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) stated that the 2017 fishery will maintain the existing measures that are implemented, notably:

- the quota for the 2017 fishery will be set at 45 tonnes;
- there will be no factory landings;
- the season will remain the same as 2016;
- the awareness campaign on reporting catches will continue;
- validation of catches through phone surveys will continue.

4.2.2 The representative of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) indicated that no deliberations have taken place as to whether the methodology for the phone survey will be made more standardised as recommended by ICES.

4.2.3 The representative of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) thanked the representative of Canada for offering assistance if required for the awareness campaign to improve catch reporting and will consider this offer further when he returns to Greenland. In addition, he expressed a willingness to consider the ICES recommendation.

4.2.4 In response to the representative of Canada, the representative of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) confirmed that there have been no discussions on limiting catches below the unilateral quota of 45 tonnes. Greenlandic authorities are focused on complying with the current three-year regulatory measure as agreed by the Parties.

**4.3 Review of the Self-assessments using the Six Tenets for Effective Management of an Atlantic Salmon Fishery (*sub-paragraph 6 of WGC(15)21*)**

4.3.1 The *Ad Hoc* Working Group on Monitoring and Control, which met in Nuuk, Greenland in October 2014, had developed a matrix for applying the six tenets for effective management of an Atlantic salmon fishery and used this to evaluate the monitoring and control of the salmon fishery at West Greenland. This evaluation resulted in the agreement of enhancements in the form of the Updated Plan for Implementation of Monitoring and Control Measures in the Salmon Fishery at West Greenland, WGC(15)20. The Working Group had recommended that the six tenets be applied by all Members of the West Greenland Commission and had recognised that the evaluation of these fisheries should be consistent with that undertaken for the salmon fishery at West Greenland. At its Thirty-Second Annual Meeting, the West Greenland Commission agreed Terms of Reference for an *Ad hoc* Working Group on the

Application of the Six Tenets for Effective Management of an Atlantic Salmon Fishery, WGC(15)23.

- 4.3.2 The Working Group had developed a revised matrix but recognised that due to the number of jurisdictions involved in the broader application of the six tenets, it would be a substantial task for a group to conduct the assessments. The Working Group had, therefore, recommended that self-assessments be undertaken using the revised matrix, and proposed that it would be more consistent with the review of the Greenland salmon fishery if these self-assessments were then subject to review. At its 2016 Inter-sessional Meeting, the Commission had agreed the revised matrix for the application of the six tenets for effective management of an Atlantic salmon fishery, WGCST(16)16. It was agreed that self-assessments should be conducted by each Party/jurisdiction of the West Greenland Commission (excluding Finland and Sweden).
- 4.3.3 Self-assessments have been submitted by Canada, European Union (Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Spain and UK) and the United States. The Commission had noted that as the application of the six tenets is part of the Regulatory Measure, it would be appropriate to review the self-assessments as part of that process during the 2017 Inter-sessional Meeting. In preparation for this, as agreed by the Commission, the self-assessments were issued to members of the Commission and the NGOs as documents WGCIS(17)3, WGCIS(17)4, WGCIS(17)5 and WGCIS(17)8. Questions on the self-assessments were provided to the Secretariat and issued to Parties/jurisdictions and NGOs as documents WGCIS(17)6rev and WGCIS(17)10. The responses to these questions are contained in document WGCIS(17)11rev.
- 4.3.4 The representative of the NGOs highlighted that Canada had not undertaken the assessment on a provincial basis, although acknowledged that Canada had provided a rationale for not doing so. The NGOs considered that reporting by province would increase transparency, notably in cases where the assignment of a single score may not be common and appropriate to each province within a particular category. In response the representative of Canada noted that there were difficulties in conducting assessments by individual province but committed to examine whether amendments can be made to better address this. The representative of the NGOs indicated that he considered that the challenge would be greater if the assessments were combined.
- 4.3.5 The representative of the European Union provided an update on the recently highlighted enforcement discrepancy in the Irish fisheries protection legislation which was first noted on 9 February 2017. He stated that significant progress has been made to address this since that time. The Irish Government has prioritised the relevant amendments to the legislation which has now successfully passed all five stages in the lower House of Parliament. The upper House of Parliament is scheduled to debate the legislation on 20 and 27 June 2017. Thereafter it is intended to have it signed into law by the President of Ireland. As there exists a six month time period to initiate prosecutions for breaches of fisheries law after an offence has been committed, it is intended that there will be no period when offences will be committed with impunity.
- 4.3.6 The representative of the European Union noted that the 6 tenets process had been useful but at the same time it was challenging to complete the report. He indicated it would be more helpful to have more measurable parameters and asked if it would be possible to integrate the process into the next cycle of Implementation Plans. The

representative of Canada agreed with the European Union. The need to find a way to streamline the process was recognised and it was suggested that the process should apply to all NASCO Parties.

4.3.7 The representative of the United States found the process to be informative but felt that the grades given (red, green, amber) by a Party to itself were not assigned consistently across all Parties. The NASCO Secretary suggested that a possible option for looking at ways to improve/streamline the process would be through the Implementation Plan Review Group who will be making a report this year. The representative of the United States agreed that this could be useful but indicated that the United States will persist in considering the six tenets when reviewing the success of the Regulatory Measure and the West Greenland fishery. The representative of the European Union indicated that WGC(15)20 which is embedded in WGC(15)21 includes all the elements of the six tenets. The representative of the NGOs indicated there is still more work to be done by all jurisdictions on catch accountability and we cannot lose sight of that fact. The WGC should ensure that the six tenets continue to be taken into account when considering implementation of the 2015-2017 regulatory measure at its next Inter-sessional Meeting by including a reference to the tenets in that agenda item.

4.4 **Other Elements of the Regulatory Measure (*sub-paragraphs 4 and 8 of WGC(15)21*)**

4.4.1 Sub-paragraph 4 of the Multi-Annual Regulatory Measure states that efforts will be made to identify and implement temporal or spatial harvest restrictions that would provide increased protection for weaker stocks taking into account information provided by ICES. In 2016, the representative of ICES indicated that the analyses presented in the ACOM advice, CNL(16)9, did not provide clear evidence of temporal and/or spatial management options for the fishery at West Greenland that would provide increased protection for weaker stocks. Although sample sizes may not be optimal, the best available information suggested that the contributing North American and European stocks mix along the coast of West Greenland and across the fishing season. The contributions to the harvest by the regional stock groupings closely mirrors the modeled estimates of MSW stock abundance, further supporting the suggestion that the stocks are well mixed within the fished complex. Although some weak relationships were identified (e.g. a higher contribution of North American river-age 1 fish in week 31, a greater number of European river-age 1 fish in the north), these relationships were preliminary and further analysis of these data, increased genetic sampling of the fishery, and further refinement in the genetic baselines used for regional assignments may be needed to investigate these patterns further.

4.4.2 The representative of ICES indicated that no further spatial or temporal analyses of the salmon stocks at West Greenland have been conducted to ascertain whether these factors may protect vulnerable stocks present there. In 2016, ICES conducted an assessment of the consequences for harvest levels and exploitation rates of delaying the opening of the season in Greenland to 15 September. This assessment indicated that there would be a reduction in the exploitation rate of all contributing stocks, including vulnerable stocks, with a reduction in the number of fish harvested per tonne. However, the tonnage landed would not significantly change as larger fish would be present in the catch later in the season. The results of this assessment were reported to NASCO by ICES in the 2016 ACOM advice. The representative of Denmark (in respect of the



Faroe Islands and Greenland) acknowledged this and indicated that no consideration has been given at present to further delaying the commencement of the fishing season beyond 15 August.

## **5. Other Business**

5.1 There was no other business.

## **6. Report of the Meeting**

6.1 The Commission agreed a report of the Inter-sessional Meeting.

## **7. Close of the Meeting**

7.1 The Chairman thanked the participants for their contributions to the Inter-sessional Meeting and closed the meeting.