



North American Commission

Report of the Thirty-Eighth Annual Meeting of the North American Commission of the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization

NAC(21)11

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By Video Conference

31 May – 2 June 2021

1. Opening of the Meeting

- 1.1 The Chair, Kim Blankenbeker (USA) opened the meeting and welcomed delegates to the video conference.
- 1.2 The Chair noted that for the second time, NASCO’s business would be conducted through inter-sessional correspondence and video conference, noting her disappointment that an in-person meeting was not possible. She thanked delegates for their flexibility and patience given the additional challenges virtual meetings pose. She also acknowledged the new meeting platform being used this year and thanked the Secretariat for the excellent meeting arrangements.
- 1.3 The Chair reminded participants that a period for inter-sessional correspondence had run from 3 May until 14 May. An Annotated Agenda, [NAC\(21\)07A](#), which includes the inter-sessional correspondence, was issued to help all delegates in their planning for the meeting. The inter-sessional correspondence can be found in full in Annex X. She noted that the Agenda, [NAC\(21\)07](#), was adopted by correspondence on 30 April, prior to the inter-sessional correspondence period.
- 1.4 The representatives of Canada and the United States provided Opening Statements in writing only. (Annex XX).
- 1.5 No formal Opening Statement was made on behalf of the Non-Government Organizations (NGOs). However, the representative of the NGOs supported the request made by the United States in its opening statement for an update from Canada on the Placentia Bay aquaculture project. The Chair indicated that this would be taken under Agenda item 6.
- 1.6 A list of participants at the Thirty-Eighth Annual Meetings of the Council and Commissions of NASCO is included as Annex XX.

2. Review of the 2020 Fishery and ACOM Report from ICES on Salmon Stocks in the Commission Area

- 2.1 A representative of ICES, Dennis Ensing, presented the scientific advice contained in the ICES Advisory Committee (ACOM) report, [CNL\(21\)11](#), in a webinar on 28 May. Dr Ensing’s presentation on the advice relevant to the North American Commission is available as document NAC(21)09 (Annex XX). The discussions that followed the presentation are contained in document CNL(21)60 (Annex XX).

3. Mixed-Stock Fisheries Conducted by Members of the Commission

- 3.1 The Commission noted that 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 an agenda item in each of the Commissions to allow for a focus on mixed-stock fisheries.

- 3.2 Canada submitted paper, NAC(21)08rev, which provided a description of the Labrador Subsistence Food Fishery, including information related to management, reported annual harvests, sampling of the fishery catches, and the origin and composition of the catches. The Commission welcomed the report.

4. Sampling in the Labrador Fishery

- 4.1 The Chair recalled that information on the sampling programme had been provided in both the ICES report, [CNL\(21\)11](#), and ‘Labrador Subsistence Food Fisheries Mixed-Stock Fisheries Context Paper’. The inter-sessional correspondence on this Agenda item can be found in Annex X.
- 4.2 In response to a question posed by the United States during the correspondence period regarding the identification of the proportion of samples coming from coastal vs estuarine regions for SFA 1A and SFA 2, a representative of Canada (Martha Robertson) provided information on this matter and noted some difficulties had been faced in collecting this information in 2020. She indicated that this matter would be addressed in time for the next fishing season. The representative of Canada indicated Canada’s intent to revise its Labrador Subsistence Food Fisheries Mixed-Stock Fisheries Context Paper to include the requested information. The revision is tabled as NAC(21)08rev.
- 4.3 The representative of the United States thanked Canada for its report as well as its efforts to improve implementation of the Labrador sampling programme. She recalled Canada’s comment from the inter-sessional correspondence process that samplers will be instructed to sample 1 of every 10 (10%) small salmon landed and 3 of every 10 (30%) large salmon landed. She hoped that resources were available for this and looked forward to the resulting data.

5. The St Pierre and Miquelon Salmon Fishery

- 5.1 The Chair thanked France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon) for providing document [CNL\(21\)21](#), which contained information on the management and sampling of the St Pierre and Miquelon salmon fishery.
- 5.2 France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon) had been unable to respond to questions during the period of inter-sessional correspondence. The Chair invited their representative to respond during the meeting.
- 5.3 The United States had asked:

‘We thank France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon) for their report on the management and sampling of the St Pierre and Miquelon Salmon Fishery (CNL(21)21). We appreciate the improved catch statistics provided, especially by size group, and we acknowledge the continued effort to sample a large proportion of the catch. We note that the reported harvest in 2020 was an increase over the 2018 and 2019 levels and is primarily due to an increase in the recreational harvest. Can France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon) explain why the harvest level increased (e.g. increased effort, increased catch per unit, etc.) and if there are any plans to set a total catch limit on recreational and professional fishers in 2021 or perhaps to establish a bag limit for

recreational harvesters to prevent the total harvest from increasing again given the scientific advice of zero harvest. We urge France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon) to consider putting in place additional management measures along these lines.'

5.4 The representative of France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon) thanked the United States for their question. She responded that the increased harvest in 2020 compared to 2019 in the Saint-Pierre and Miquelon Salmon Fishery does not mean that the pressure on the salmon has increased. 2020 is the fourth year with the lowest level of catch, all fisheries combined. The increase of the level in the recreational harvest is explained by the exceptional context of the pandemic which created a resurgence in interest among the population in outdoor activities after the release from lockdown, which had led to a postponement of the opening of the season. France (in respect of Saint-Pierre and Miquelon) shares concerns about the abundance of North American stocks and will work to improve the monitoring and management of the Saint-Pierre and Miquelon salmon fishery, in close collaboration with fishermen.

5.5 Canada had asked France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon):

'Canada welcomes this opportunity to continue discussions about the effectiveness of current monitoring and control measures in place at the mixed-stock fisheries in St. Pierre and Miquelon, where a high percentage of these harvests originate from Canadian river-systems with depleted populations. Despite the catch stabilization in 2018 and 2019, Canada remains concerned with the increase in recreational catch, particularly given the use of gillnets by the recreational fishery, and the absence of individual licence catch limits. We would appreciate clarity on France's plans to integrate more effective limits for this fishery, such as the option to impose limits on the total catch per recreational licence.'

5.6 The representative of France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon) thanked Canada for their question. She reiterated that the increased harvest in 2020 compared to 2019 in the Saint-Pierre and Miquelon Salmon Fishery does not mean that the pressure on the salmon has increased, noting again that 2020 is the fourth year with the lowest level of catch, all fisheries combined. The increase of the level in the recreational harvest is explained by the exceptional context of the pandemic. What is more, efforts have already been made and must be underlined, such as, the reorientation of professional fishing effort towards other species and the scientific partnership with recreational fishermen, who are more and more numerous, to carry out sampling. France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon) is in favour of the implementation of new management and catch limitation measures and continues to work closely with recreational fishermen on this sensitive subject, as salmon fishing is a well-established tradition in the territory. For now, France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon) is working on a new regulation to limit the number of licences for the recreational fishery in order to prevent the total harvest from increasing again. In 2021 the inspection team will have their own patrol boat and inspections will be easier. Finally, regarding the concern about the use of gill nets by the recreational fishery, IFREMER, our scientific institute, is working on an experiment on angling with recreational fishers as a more selective fishing alternative.

5.7 The representative of Canada thanked France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon) for its co-operation and for placing limits on licences. He asked when those limits would come into effect. The representative of France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon) replied that the new regulation was planned for 2020, but it was not possible to

implement it then. The new regulation will be adopted for 2021 and will allow no more than 80 recreational fishing licences.

- 5.8 The representative of the United States thanked France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon) for its report and noted appreciation for the improved catch statistics and the effort to sample a large proportion of the catch. She noted interest in the work being done to look at the potential of moving away from gill nets in the recreational fishery and toward angling as a way to improve selectivity. She urged France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon) to consider implementing stronger measures to reduce catches, as it is a mixed-stock fishery with many contributing stocks in poor condition, including critically endangered U.S. populations.
- 5.9 The representative of the NGOs asked about the cap on regulatory licences for recreational fishermen. He noted that 81 licences were allocated last year and asked how this was done. The representative of France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon) said that licences are allocated on a first come, first served basis, but it is mostly the same people who receive licences every year.

6. Salmonid Introductions and Transfers

- 6.1 Recalling the 2010 decision that the members of the Commission would provide focused annual reports on issues of mutual concern, including salmonid disease incidences, breaches of containment, introductions from outside the Commission area and transgenics [NAC\(10\)6](#). The Chair noted that both Canada, [NAC\(21\)06rev2](#), and the United States, [NAC\(21\)05](#), had tabled annual reports.
- 6.2 The Chair noted that some discussion on this item was conducted during the inter-sessional correspondence period (Annex X). She then invited the representative of Canada to respond to the questions about Greig's proposed Placentia Bay aquaculture project by the United States in its opening statement and the NGO co-chair in agenda item 1.
- 6.3 The representative of Canada said the project by Grieg is moving forward with rearing sterile, European-origin, triploid Atlantic salmon at 11 marine-based sites in Placentia Bay, Newfoundland. Each marine site will consist of multiple cages, with nets extending down to 43 metres. Grieg submitted the project proposal in February 2016 and it has undergone a series of provincial and federal reviews and assessments. More information is publicly available on the provincial government's website. Grieg introduced their first batches of triploid European salmon eggs at their land-based hatchery in Marystown in 2020 and is planning to stock a marine-based site in 2021 in Placentia Bay. Prior to DFO's approval to transfer smolt to marine cages, the company will be sampling fish (via blood) to verify the fish are sterile before introduction to the marine cages. The development of a triploid verification methodology for sterility was a condition of release from their provincial environmental assessment and was approved by both the provincial and federal governments.
- 6.4 The representative of the United States thanked Canada for this information, noting the importance of providing information on the Placentia Bay aquaculture project and other planned or ongoing introduction and transfer activities in their Annual Report to the Commission. She noted the response that the company would check that the fish were triploid before they were transferred to the ocean and asked whether every fish was tested or just a subsample. The representative of Canada replied that the eggs were initially tested twice for triploidy by the supplier in Iceland. As an additional third precautionary measure, DFO and the Province require another round of triploid testing

of Grieg's smolts before they are transferred to marine net-pens. A sufficient portion of the total fish will be tested by a third-party laboratory to provide 99% probability that a triploid failure, if present, is detected. Both the Province and DFO have reviewed the sampling approach and supporting documentation that the company provided and have approved.

- 6.5 The representative of the NGOs asked about two recent developments that may affect the Placentia Bay aquaculture project. First, he noted that the Government of Norway is abandoning triploid experiments, as such fish are more susceptible to disease and because of animal welfare issues. He asked what will happen if the same problems arise in Newfoundland. Might diploids be used, and would the project be required to undergo another environmental impact assessment before it can continue? The representative of Canada said that they were aware of the recent decision by Norway and continue to follow the global research and emerging science on triploids. He noted that the Department has already set a precedent for not allowing diploid, viable European-origin salmon in Canadian waters. It was determined at the time of Grieg's environmental assessment that there was insufficient diploid North American-origin stock to support the company's production goals. Assuming sufficient diploid North American-origin stock existed, while it would change the scope of the original Environmental Assessment, it would continue to comply with current provincial and federal regulations.
- 6.6 Secondly, the representative of the NGOs noted that originally the project had planned to use large (super) smolts, by growing them to 1.5k g on land before putting them in the ocean. This would reduce the time the fish were kept in net pens and, therefore, reduce escapes and diseases. However, he noted that the company announced last year that, for financial reasons, this part of the project was on hold. The representative of the NGOs noted that if this aspect of the project is abandoned, it changes the risk profile that was evaluated in the environmental impact assessment. He asked if the representative of Canada knows about the company's plans in this regard, and what would happen if this element of the project is abandoned. The representative of Canada replied that Grieg postponed the construction of the super or post-smolt facility in 2020 due to Covid-19 challenges but is expected to pursue production of larger smolts in the future. This year, normal sized smolts will be transferred to marine cages resulting in extended time smolts are in marine cages as is the status quo practice of the other companies. As this is with status quo and does not change the scope of operations, it does not require re-evaluation by the Province and DFO.
- 6.7 Finally, the representative of the NGOs noted that there have been 25 outbreaks of infectious salmon anaemia (ISA) in aquaculture operations in the provinces of Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Labrador. He asked whether Canada is investigating this situation and has plans to study the impacts on wild salmon of those cases. The representative of the NGOs also asked whether Canada is investigating cases and studying the impact of piscine orthoreovirus (PRV) of wild Atlantic salmon detected in the presence of aquaculture operations. Regarding ISA, the representative of Canada replied that it is a reportable disease in Canada. Anyone who owns or works with aquatic animals and knows of, or suspects a reportable disease is required by law to notify the Canadian Food and Inspection Agency (CFIA). If a reportable disease were to be detected, the CFIA would begin an investigation. Fisheries and Oceans Canada has undertaken and continues to conduct research on ISA and its impact on wild salmon. Additionally, DFO is planning an assessment of the risk to wild salmon due to ISA released from salmon farms in the coming year. Regarding

PRV, the representative of Canada replied that there have been no PRV ‘virus outbreaks’ on the East Coast of Canada. PRV has been detected in farmed Atlantic salmon but has not been confirmed in wild salmon on the East Coast and there have been no associated disease events. DFO continues to investigate its occurrence in salmon on the East Coast of Canada.

- 6.8 The representative of the NGOs noted that Canada reported the escape of one salmon smolt in 2020 / 2021, which does not represent all of the escapes that occur. He asked if Canada and the United States could provide in their Annual Reports to the Commission information on confirmed escapees that turn up in monitoring facilities. This is consistent with NASCO’s ‘Guidance on Best Management Practices to address impacts of sea lice and escaped farmed salmon on wild salmon stocks’, [SLG\(09\)5](#). The representatives of the United States and Canada agreed to consider this and if possible, provide any information that might be available.

7. Announcement of the Tag Return Incentive Scheme Prize

- 7.1 The winner of the North American Commission £1,000 prize in the NASCO Tag Return Incentive Scheme is Mr. Colin Gilks from Canada.
- 7.2 The tag was placed on a grilse returning to the Southwest Miramichi River (New Brunswick, Canada) in 2018. The fish was captured on 25 September 2018 at the estuary trap net in Millerton operated by Fisheries and Oceans Canada as part of the assessment program for Atlantic salmon in the Miramichi River. The fish was sampled for length, sex identification, scale sampled, and externally marked with a light blue Carlin tag prior to release back to the river. It measured 55.1 cm fork length and based on external characteristics the salmon was identified as a wild male. It was recaptured during the black salmon (kelt) recreational fishery on 3 May 2019 in the Southwest Miramichi River at Blissfield. It was subsequently released by the angler as there were mandatory catch and release measures in place for Atlantic salmon in 2019.

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

- 8.1 The Chair of the Standing Scientific Committee (SSC), which assists the Council and Commissions in formulating their questions to ICES, Paddy Gargan, presented the relevant sections of the Draft Request to ICES for Scientific Advice.
- 8.2 Noting that there may need to be adjustment to the questions depending on the outcome of discussions in another Commission, the North Atlantic Commission agreed in principle to accept the relevant section of the SSC’s recommendation and referred it to the Council for adoption. The Commission agreed that adjustments could be made to the Draft Request in Council, if required. The final request is contained in document, CNL(21)XX, (Annex X).

9. Other Business

- 9.1 There was no other business.

10. Date and Place of the Next Meeting

- 10.1 The Commission agreed to hold its next Annual Meeting at the same time and place as the Thirty-Ninth Annual Meeting of NASCO

11. Report of the Meeting

11.1 The Commission agreed the Report of the Meeting.

12. Close of the Meeting

- 12.1 The Chair thanked the members of the Commission and all participants for their constructive engagement in the work of the Commission during the Annual Meeting and thanked the Secretariat for their excellent support. She closed the meeting.