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4 March 2019

Mr Kristján Þór Júlíusson
Minister of Fisheries and Agriculture
Ministry of Industries and Innovation
Skulagata 4
101 Reykjavík
Iceland



Dear Minister Júlíusson,

I am writing on behalf of all the Parties to the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization (NASCO). As you will be aware, Iceland denounced the Convention for the Conservation of Salmon in the North Atlantic Ocean in 2009 and as a consequence ceased to be a Party to NASCO. However, at that time Iceland indicated its intention to re-accede to the Convention 'in the next few years' when the economic situation improves.

Given the continuing situation of low abundance facing Atlantic salmon all around the North Atlantic, we believe that the need for international co-operation on this valuable and iconic species has never been greater. We hope, therefore, that Iceland, which played such a central role in establishing NASCO back in 1984, will be able to rejoin the intergovernmental organization devoted to its conservation and restoration and once again participate fully in its work. In 2012, an external review of NASCO's work, conducted in accordance with the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 61/105 by a panel comprising representatives of UNDOALOS, FAO and NEAFC, shared this view and encouraged Iceland to re-accede to the NASCO Convention.

NASCO's important contribution to salmon conservation has been recognised widely by the international community, including its 41 accredited Non-Government Organizations, that represent a wide range of stakeholders, and the external review panel referred to above. This contribution was also noted by Iceland at the time of its withdrawal from NASCO when it was noted that '...the activity within the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization has been very pleasant and fruitful for Iceland'. Furthermore, in a letter dated 17 July 2009 (copy attached), Mr Thorgeirsson (the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Fisheries and Agriculture at that time) had highlighted the importance of NASCO's work over the previous 25 years or so for the conservation of Icelandic salmon stocks and he noted the need for an international platform to address the various issues facing the resource not just those related to the fisheries but also habitat degradation and the threats from cage culture for which NASCO has developed internationally approved agreements.

There are important international issues to address in the coming years to try to halt the decline in salmon stocks across the whole of the North Atlantic. A new regulatory measure / decision for the Faroese salmon fishery was renegotiated in 2018. We would hope that Iceland should be, and would wish to be, part of that process. A major factor currently influencing the poor salmon returns is increased mortality at sea. Through NASCO's International Atlantic Salmon Research Board, a major multi-million pound programme of research on salmon at sea, SALSEA, was developed and implemented by NASCO through a public / private partnership. This programme has delivered new insights into the marine ecology of the species, increased knowledge of the salmon's migration routes and distribution at sea and the factors influencing it and delivered valuable new tools to support rational management. In a development since then, since 2016, the European Union has provided grant money through three grants, one of which has Norway's involvement, to (1) quantify the

mortality of salmon smolts before they reach the open sea to enable the determination of mortality hotspots across the studied range and identify potential bottlenecks to their successful migration out to sea and (2) produce sea lice dispersal models to enable the best placement of marine salmon farms to minimise the risk of sea lice infection to wild salmon. In a recent development, the Atlantic Salmon Trust (AST) has been developing a concept that seeks to provide coherent guidance on how future research on salmon survival can be targeted and prioritised. This has become known as the 'AST Likely Suspects Framework. NASCO is working with the AST to develop a series of workshops in conjunction with ICES that will explore how best to integrate available data on salmon, specifically data on marine survival, within the appropriate ICES database(s) for use in models to advance the conservation of wild salmon at sea. This level of interdisciplinary collaboration and co-operation has not been seen before in the salmon world and is a welcome fresh approach to salmon conservation. It is an especially appropriate project in 2019 – what is the focal year for the International Year of the Salmon.

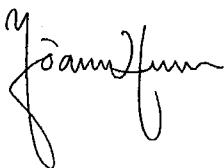
The International Year of the Salmon is an initiative to inform and stimulate outreach and research that aspires to establish the conditions necessary to ensure the resilience of salmon and people throughout the Northern Hemisphere. Its aims are to: encourage scientists, decision-makers and the public to work towards solutions that overcome the challenges salmon face; support conservation and restoration strategies to help manage salmon in the face of climate change; enable collaboration among organizations and researchers in countries throughout the Northern Hemisphere; inspire and support a new generation of researchers and managers, and conservationists; help create a greater awareness of the ecological, social, cultural and economic value of salmon; and support research and conservation of salmon species and their environments throughout the Northern Hemisphere.

We are grateful for Iceland's involvement in salmon conservation through initiatives that have been developed through ICES. These include the partial screening of the mackerel fishery catches that has been undertaken by the Icelandic Directorate of Fisheries to check for bycatch of salmon and Iceland's participation in the International Ecosystem Summer Survey of the Nordic Seas (IESSNS): a collaborative programme involving research vessels from Iceland, the Faroes, and Norway. These surveys are carried out annually in July–August in an area that overlaps in time and space with the known distribution of post-smolts in the North Atlantic and these are now recorded routinely by each country's participating survey vessels. Additionally, you have been informing us of any surveillance activity for potential illegal fishing for salmon in international waters in most years since 1993.

We believe that the international work of NASCO on salmon supports the important work being undertaken by you nationally. The Parties to NASCO very much hope that Iceland will rejoin NASCO so as to continue its important contribution to the international efforts to conserve and restore the Atlantic salmon. It would seem fitting for Iceland to rejoin in this – the International Year of the Salmon.

I look forward to receiving your response in due course but if you would like additional information on NASCO's work please do not hesitate to contact our Secretary, Dr Emma Hatfield, who will be very pleased to assist.

Yours sincerely,



Jóannes Hansen
President

Enclosures

Copied to Mr Guðlaugur Þór Þórðarson – Minister for Foreign Affairs



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Subject: Withdrawal of Iceland from the NASCO Convention

As has already been conveyed to the NASCO Secretariat through diplomatic channels the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries has taken the painful decision to withdraw from the NASCO Convention. We want to stress that this decision is taken purely for economic reasons which relates to the collapse of the Icelandic Banking System in October 2008. This has forced the Icelandic Government to cut Government Budgets in a drastic manner in all internal as well as international spheres and activities. Our economic crisis is unprecedented and requires extremely severe and painful measures. However, we sincerely hope to re-accede to the NASCO Convention when the economic situation improves.

We want to emphasize that the work of NASCO, which was established in Iceland over 25 years ago, has been very rewarding and important for the conservation of Icelandic salmon stocks. Although fisheries for salmon in international waters have been greatly reduced through NASCO Agreements many salmon stocks are still vulnerable and we all know that these are challenging times for wild Atlantic salmon with some remaining coastal fisheries, increased degradation of the salmon's freshwater habitat and increasing threats from the cage culture of salmon. We want to commend NASCO for its efforts to deal with these threats and certainly feel that it is important to have an international platform to address these problems and share experience and knowledge.

Sincerely,

Sigurgeir Þorgeirsson
Permanent Secretary

Cc: Árni Ísaksson President