

WGC(01)17

Report of the Eighteenth Annual Meeting of the West Greenland Commission of the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization 4-8 June 2001, Mondariz, Galicia

1. Opening of the Meeting

- 1.1 The Chairman, Mr Andrew Thomson (European Union), opened the Eighteenth Annual Meeting of the West Greenland Commission (WGC) and welcomed the delegates to Mondariz.
- 1.2 A list of participants at the Eighteenth Annual Meeting of the Council and Commissions of NASCO is included on page [] of this document.

2. Adoption of the Agenda

- 2.1 The Commission adopted its agenda, WGC(01)19 (Annex 1).

3. Nomination of Rapporteur

- 3.1 Ms Julia Barrow (Canada) served as Rapporteur for the meeting.

4. Review of the 2000 Fishery and ACFM Report from ICES on Salmon Stocks in the Commission Area

- 4.1 The representative of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) tabled a document WGC(01)5 (Annex 2) describing events in the fishery at West Greenland in 2000. The fishery commenced on 14 August 2000 and was closed less than a week later on 18 August when the catches reported to the Greenland Fishing Licence Control Authority had reached 18 tonnes. As in 1999, one company was given permission to purchase salmon from the fishermen for distribution in Greenland. Reported catches for sale totalled 19,900kg and reported catches for private consumption totalled 604.5kg. Unreported catches were estimated to be approximately 10 tonnes in 2000. The fishery in 2000 had been extremely rapid with mean daily landings per fisherman considerably higher than in 1999. The representative of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) tabled document WGC(01)4 (Annex 3) which, he noted, indicated that catch per unit effort (CPUE) in 2000 was higher than in previous years as far back as 1987. He suggested that this CPUE data is in accordance with the forecast of pre-fishery abundance (PFA) for 2000.
- 4.2 The representative of the United States asked about the geographic distribution of the fishery in 2000. The representative of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) responded that the fishery had been concentrated in two areas in the south of Greenland but cautioned that this did not mean that fish were not present in the

other areas, rather that the fishery had not commenced in these areas before the fishery was closed.

- 4.3 The representative of the European Union noted that in the period 1987-92 when the CPUE indicated in WGC(01)4 was low, the abundance reported by ICES was actually higher than the 2000 PFA estimate, suggesting that CPUE was not a good indicator of abundance at West Greenland in 2000.
- 4.4 The representative of ICES commented that, to be more meaningful, the CPUE data shown in WGC(01)4 could have been divided into European and North American components and noted that the trend in overall CPUE was driven by the CPUE in just one area (NAFO 1F) at Greenland. He also suggested that it would be unwise to place too much reliance on a brief burst in the fishery which may not be a good indicator of the size of the stock.
- 4.5 The representative of the United States stated that the difficulty in interpreting the graphs in document WGC(01)4 is that in the years prior to 2000, the CPUE was averaged over the full period of the fishery so that a high CPUE early in the fishery might be balanced by a lower CPUE later in the season. This would not have happened with the short season in 2000. However, in general the average CPUE roughly tracks the estimates of PFA.
- 4.6 The representative of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) indicated that there had been no intention of having a detailed discussion of the information in document WGC(01)4. His delegation was happy for the Working Group to make use of the information as it felt appropriate. He introduced document WGC(01)6 (Annex 4) which updated information on catches of multi-sea-winter (MSW) salmon tabled in 2000 and which took account of the helpful comments received from the Parties. Information on catches in Greenland, Canada, the European Union and the United States, with and without the inclusion of unreported catches, is included in this document. This shows that in spite of restrictions introduced in Canada and the European Union, more MSW salmon were caught in 2000 than in 1999. He concluded that this indicated an improvement in stocks.
- 4.7 The representative of Canada stated that the figures for Canada are not indicative of an increase in abundance and it was clear that catches had declined significantly. The estimates of unreported catches for 2000 are likely on the high side as they are essentially a roll-over of 1999 figures. Moreover, Canada has invested CAN\$1 million in order to reduce unreported catches. New management measures have been introduced in Labrador because of concern about stock status. These are detailed in paper NAC(01)7 which the Canadian delegation would be willing to make available to the Commission.
- 4.8 The representative of ICES presented an overview of the 2001 ICES advice. The ICES advice is contained in document CNL(01)11 and his slide presentation is contained in CNL(01)46. The ACFM Report from ICES, which contains the scientific advice relevant to all Commissions, is included on page [] of this document.
- 4.9 A discussion followed during which various clarifications were sought by all Parties from the ICES representative, especially on the factors contributing to the

uncertainties on which the forecast PFA is based. These factors include the lack of data from Labrador.

- 4.10 The representative of the United States commented that the distribution of PFA forecast estimates in Table 3.4.1.1 of the ACFM report shows a broader, flatter distribution than in previous years, especially with the lack of data for Labrador rivers. This means that abundance could be very low. At the 50% risk probability level, there is a 50% chance that the PFA is lower than the forecast and that there is a significant probability that the PFA could be less than 145,125 fish. In this case, any harvest would be risky.
- 4.11 The representative of ICES agreed that the wide distribution of PFA forecasts is due to a lack of information and that a small change in risk probability level leads to a large change in these forecasts.
- 4.12 The representative of Canada shared the view of the United States that there is a large risk in having any fishery. Recognizing that the lack of data from Labrador is creating some of the uncertainty, he announced that Canada is committed to monitoring two additional Labrador rivers for returns.
- 4.13 The representative of the European Union stated that it would be very risk-prone to use the 50% level of risk which, in reality, could result in the conservation limits not being met every second year. The European Union generally uses a 5% probability level and sometimes 10%. He asked ICES if there was any reason to believe that southern European stocks have improved since conservation measures were introduced in 1999.
- 4.14 The representative of ICES indicated that, generally, there has been little improvement in southern European rivers. Whilst there has been some improvement, there are a number of rivers which have not improved.
- 4.15 The representative of the United States pointed out that major abundance spikes in any model require closer attention. ICES advice indicates that lagged spawner estimates are responsible for the spike level increase.
- 4.16 The representative of ICES confirmed that the increase in the PFA estimates is sensitive to estimates of lagged spawners and there is uncertainty about these estimates. This element accounts for 80% of the model uncertainty and in Labrador the estimates of lagged spawners are increasingly uncertain.
- 4.17 The representative of the United States indicated that he was concerned about the lack of monitoring of Labrador stocks in recent years, on which the largest part of the projected increase is based. If stocks do not increase as projected, but are harvested as if they had increased, the impact will be even greater on other stocks, again creating a high risk situation. He asked if ICES can determine the abundance and distribution of fish in the West Greenland fishery.
- 4.18 The representative of ICES indicated that more DNA research is required in order to identify the different components in the West Greenland fishery.

- 4.19 The representative of the European Union asked for further clarification on the reasons for the increase in the European-origin fish at West Greenland in 2000, particularly since these stocks are below their spawning escapement reserve.
- 4.20 ICES responded that it was due to the concentration of the fishery in two regions, where southern European stocks were more concentrated.
- 4.21 In order to clarify issues and give better guidance to managers in considering the scientific advice, the Chairman tabled document WGC(01)7 (Annex 5), containing a number of questions and answers of direct relevance.

5. Regulatory Measures

- 5.1 The Chairman reminded the Commission of its endorsement in 2000 of the multi-year (1999-2000) regulatory measure to restrict the West Greenland catch to the amount for internal consumption, i.e. 20 tonnes, but that an agreement would be required for the 2001 fishery. Furthermore, a Resolution was passed last year which stated that unless a significant improvement is demonstrated in the condition of stocks available to the West Greenland fishery, the catch at West Greenland in 2001 would be restricted to the lowest possible level.
- 5.2 The representative of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) briefly introduced the history of West Greenland quotas, stating Denmark's willingness to enter into an agreement on quota-setting based on a biological model, structured such that the quota could increase as well as decrease depending on the status of the resource. He also presented the 1993 Agreement (WGC(93)9) and an Addendum (WGC(97)10) from 1997, indicating Denmark's understanding that this is the basis for determining West Greenland quotas from 1998 onwards. Based on this agreement and using a 50% risk probability level, as set out in Annex 1 of the Addendum, he suggested an appropriate quota for West Greenland in 2001 of 200 tonnes. The representative of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) noted that the figure resulting from the model would have been 317 tonnes if the same calculation methods had been applied as in 2000.
- 5.3 The representative of Canada indicated that this approach would be extremely risky, in the light of the ICES advice that any level of fishery could expose the stocks to severe overfishing. He further stated that the 1993 Agreement states that the quota would be based on the best possible scientific advice available from ICES, which for 2001 clearly recommends that there be no fishery. He indicated that in order to increase the certainty of the model outputs with improved data, Canada is committing resources to salmon science and management in southern Labrador through the monitoring of returns to two additional salmon rivers and in order to enforce rules on southern Labrador rivers, is working with First Nations to put into operation six new Aboriginal guardians.
- 5.4 The representative of the United States appreciated the history lesson from Greenland and referred to other agreements which are relevant, including the Precautionary Approach agreement, which should guide the Commission. He referred to the level of uncertainty in the model, which is driven by lagged spawners. ICES had advised that the stocks are outside safe biological limits, and he referred to the listing of wild salmon in the United States under the Endangered Species Act. With zero probability

of reaching conservation limits, the United States would be unable to accept a 200-tonne quota.

- 5.5 The representative of the European Union agreed with the comments from Canada and the United States. He suggested that, with reference to the Commission's Resolution of 2000, if the ICES advice is correct, a subsistence fishery would be appropriate for 2001. He was aware of the problems encountered by Greenland but queried whether the test in the Resolution had been met.
- 5.6 The representative of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) reiterated the need for Parties to maintain agreements whether or not those agreements were favourable. They felt that they had adhered to the 1993 and 1997 agreements even when the stock situation was bad, and felt that they should now be able to benefit from improved abundance. Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) would prefer to work on the basis of these agreements and indicated that the ICES advice was irrelevant since it aimed to protect the weakest rivers. The West Greenland Commission had been established to find solutions to problems of mixed stock fishing.
- 5.7 Following much discussion, and work by scientists from each delegation to draft a document, the Chairman tabled document WGC(01)15 "Ad Hoc Management Programme for the 2001 Fishery at West Greenland".
- 5.8 The representative of the United States provided an overview of the document. It sets out a system of corroborating evidence of abundance using CPUE, which appears to be a reliable index of the abundance of the stocks. There will be three fishery openings, with the last two dependent on abundance indicated by information gathered during the previous opening. This strategy may allow higher harvest levels, if appropriate, based on observed abundance without dramatically increasing the risk to stocks. New data gathered will also be useful in assessing stocks in future years.
- 5.9 The representative of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) indicated that the system would also only apply to fish landed for sale to factories, but that fish for personal use would be reported. He pointed out that there were still concerns that southern European stocks are below their conservation limits and urged the authorities there to take further action.
- 5.10 The representative of the European Union indicated that the management programme is a constructive development, which provides an opportunity to collect additional scientific data for further evaluation of the West Greenland fishery. He also commented that he hopes that the inability to incorporate data on southern European stocks into the regulatory process will be rectified in the near future.
- 5.11 The representative of Canada reminded the Commission that Canada has reduced mixed stock fisheries and is currently moving to fill the data gap in Labrador rivers. He welcomed this strategy as it may provide the data needed to develop fishing plans to minimise the exploitation of weaker stocks.
- 5.12 The representative of the United States, whilst unable to support any harvest of US-origin salmon, also welcomed this conservation-based harvest scheme as it bases harvest decisions on real fish and better data, and is consistent with the Precautionary

Approach. Although he could not vote on this issue, he indicated his strong support for the proposed Programme.

- 5.13 With the very positive indications coming from all Parties, the Ad Hoc Management Programme, WGC(01)16 (Annex 6), was adopted by consensus.

6. Application of the Precautionary Approach Decision Structure to the West Greenland Commission

- 6.1 The Chairman referred to the fact that at its last annual meeting the Council had provisionally adopted a decision structure for use in the management of single and mixed stock fisheries pending a detailed evaluation over the next two years. It had been agreed that the decision structure would be considered by NASCO's Commissions at their meetings and that each Contracting Party should apply the decision structure on a selection of rivers with different stock status and management policies. There would be a report to the Standing Committee on the Precautionary Approach (SCPA) in the spring of 2002 so that there could be a thorough evaluation of the decision structure.
- 6.2 The representative of the European Union tabled a document, WGC(01)11, containing initial comments on the decision structure. The decision structure had been applied to a number of salmon stocks/fisheries and the experience gained provided an opportunity for managers and scientists to evaluate the overall purpose of the decision structure, how it may best be used and whether the questions and layout could be improved. Further information will be supplied to the SCPA in spring 2002.
- 6.3 The representative of Canada tabled document WGC(01)10. The decision structure had been applied to five river systems in Canada. The usefulness of the decision structure will be reviewed during a post-season analysis involving departmental managers, scientists and stakeholders so that recommendations can be given to the SCPA in spring 2002.
- 6.4 The representative of the United States tabled document WGC(01)12 which detailed a trial application of the decision structure to examine if it would give the same results as the process that led to the listing of the Gulf of Maine distinct population segment under the Endangered Species Act. This trial application reached the same conclusion as the listing process.
- 6.5 The representative of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) tabled document WGC(01)13, containing initial comments on the decision structure. Although it was more difficult to apply the decision structure in the case of Greenland, the results were found to be consistent with ICES advice.
- 6.6 The representative of the European Union made the following statement:
- “The adoption of the Precautionary Approach requires, *inter alia*, that stocks be maintained above conservation limits, and NASCO has suggested that this might be achieved by means of management targets. This is not consistent with the approach used in recent years to set a quota for West Greenland. ICES has also advised that there appear to be some inconsistencies in the way that biological reference points are

applied to salmon. However, it is clearly the responsibility of NASCO managers to determine how this should be taken forward. We strongly believe that NASCO should be taking greater account of uncertainties in the scientific advice in determining management actions. We are aware, however, that ICES requires feedback from us before they can take the next step in developing their advice. For example, it is up to NASCO to decide which of the approaches (suggested by ICES) might be appropriate for taking account of uncertainty and what levels of risk should be adopted.”

7. Sampling in the West Greenland Fishery

- 7.1 The representative of the United States endorsed the commitments being made for increased sampling in the West Greenland fishery and stressed the need to have access to fish for sampling. He raised the issue of Greenland’s health regulation requirements which necessitated the purchase of salmon by samplers in 2000.
- 7.2 The representative of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) clarified that “purchase” occurs when one enters the building where the purchase will take place. The situation could be dealt with by having the sampling done before the fish are purchased.
- 7.3 The Chairman introduced document WGC(01)14, prepared by the scientists from all Commission Parties, which sets out an agreement on commitments made by the various Parties to the West Greenland fishery sampling programme for 2001. An explanation was given on their behalf by the US scientist. A number of drafting changes were made to take account of other developments in the Commission’s business. This document, as amended, is contained in Annex 7.

8. Announcement of the Tag Return Incentive Scheme Prize

- 8.1 The Chairman announced that the winner of the 2001 NASCO Tag Return Incentive Scheme Prize for the West Greenland Commission area was Mr Sigurd Motzfeldt of Qassimiut, South Greenland. The winning tag was of Canadian origin and was applied to a smolt which was released from the Yarmouth Fish Culture Station into the Tusket River, Nova Scotia in 1986. It was recaptured near Qassimiut in 1989/90. The winner will receive a prize of US\$1500. The Commission offered its congratulations to the winner.

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

- 9.1 The Chairman of the Standing Scientific Committee referred the Commission to document SSC(01)3, particularly section 4 which pertains to the West Greenland Commission. The Commission agreed to recommend this to the Council as part of the annual request to ICES for scientific advice. The request to ICES as agreed by the Council, CNL(01)66, is included on page [] of the report.

10. Other Business

10.1 There was no other business.

11. Date and Place of Next Meeting

11.1 The next meeting of the West Greenland Commission will be held during the Nineteenth Annual Meeting of the Council, 3-7 June 2002.

11.2 The Chairman asked if Parties felt there was a need for another meeting of the Commission prior to next year's annual NASCO meeting.

11.3 The representative of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) explained that Greenland will be reporting on the 2001 fishery during the fishery itself and in autumn 2001. The Contracting Parties will then review the fishery in March 2002, if not before, by correspondence. Following the availability of the ICES report, it would be desirable to have a teleconference in order to discuss the advice. He requested that, for 2003 onwards, the West Greenland Commission meeting should be held two weeks later than at present, i.e. late June, to allow time for translation of ICES documents in Greenland.

12. Consideration of the Report of the Meeting

12.1 The Commission agreed a report of the meeting, WGC(01)17.