CNL(22)49

Statement on Salmon Farming from the Council of the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization

The North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization (NASCO) has recognised the adverse impacts of some salmon farming practices and operations on wild Atlantic salmon populations since 1988. Since the early 1980s, salmon farming around the North Atlantic has increased dramatically, from an industry in its infancy producing around five million farmed salmon per annum to over 360 million farmed salmon in 2020. Meanwhile, the abundance of adult wild Atlantic salmon has plummeted from seven million fish in the early 1980s to some 2.8 million fish in 2019 due to a complex variety of stressors caused by human activity affecting both rivers and the marine environment.

In 2006, NASCO adopted a 'Resolution by the Parties to the Convention for the Conservation of Salmon in the North Atlantic Ocean to Minimise Impacts from Aquaculture, Introductions and Transfers, and Transgenics on the Wild Salmon Stocks', CNL(06)48, also known as the 'Williamsburg Resolution'. Under this Resolution, NASCO Parties have agreed to co-operate to minimise the adverse effects to the wild salmon stocks from aquaculture, including:

- minimising escapes of farmed salmon to a level that is as close as practicable to zero; and
- minimising the risk of disease and parasite transmission between aquaculture activities and wild salmon stocks.

Further, NASCO has worked with the International Salmon Farmers Association (ISFA), to develop 'Guidance on Best Management Practices to Address Impacts of Sea Lice and Escaped Farmed Salmon on Wild Salmon Stocks', SLG(09)5. The international goals of this Guidance, agreed jointly by NASCO and ISFA, are:

- 100% of farms to have effective sea lice management such that there is no increase in sea lice loads or lice-induced mortality of wild salmonids attributable to the farms; and
- 100% farmed fish to be retained in all production facilities.

Despite these efforts, an increasing body of evidence continues to point to the adverse impacts of salmon farming practices and operations on wild Atlantic salmon, both from sea lice and escaped farmed salmon. This message was reinforced in the recent NASCO Theme-based Special Session on 'Minimising Impacts of Salmon Farming on Wild Atlantic Salmon', held at NASCO's Thirty-Eighth Annual Meeting in June 2021.

Following that Theme-based Special Session, the Council of NASCO has agreed that:

- Highlighting the conservation needs of wild Atlantic salmon, NASCO urges the development of innovative salmon farming technologies, both at sea and on land, and, where those technologies provide additional environmental protections, encourages their use, or the use of equally effective alternative approaches, to enable further progress toward the attainment of the international goals on effective sea lice management and containment agreed by ISFA and NASCO in 2009. One possible strategy for implementation, should a Party deem it appropriate, would be to prioritise this approach initially in sensitive areas, such as in areas where wild salmon stocks are

already severely weakened or threatened, the estuaries of NASCO Class I[1] salmon rivers or salmon rivers and other areas designated by Parties and jurisdictions for conservation and / or protection, and along salmon migration routes. NASCO recognises the importance of Atlantic salmon, both wild and farmed, especially in coastal and rural areas and notes the need for careful continuance and development of farming practices to attain the mutually agreed upon international goals.

[1] Rivers are classified as Class I when they are pristine. Class I rivers have no significant human-induced habitat alterations, and neither any history of introductions or transfers of fish into the watersheds nor any fish-rearing operations in the watersheds, and no aquaculture has been conducted in marine cage culture within a specified distance of the river.