

	<p>North American Commission</p> <p><i>Report of the Thirty-Ninth Annual Meeting of the North American Commission of the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization</i></p>	<p>NAC(22)11</p>
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Report of the Thirty-Ninth Annual Meeting of the North American Commission of the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization

Dalmahoy Hotel & Country Club, Edinburgh, UK

6 – 9 June 2022

1. Opening of the Meeting

- 1.1 The Chair, Kim Blankenbeker (USA) opened the meeting and welcomed delegates.
- 1.2 Written Opening Statements were provided by Canada and the United States (Annex 1).
- 1.3 A list of participants at the Thirty-Ninth Annual Meetings of the Council and Commissions of NASCO is included as Annex 2.

2. Adoption of the Agenda

- 2.1 The Commission adopted its Agenda, [NAC\(22\)07](#) (Annex 3).

3. Nomination of a Rapporteur

- 3.1 Livia Goodbrand (Canada) was appointed as Rapporteur.

4. Election of Officers

- 4.1 The Commission elected Isabelle Morisset (Canada) as its Chair (proposed by the representative of the United States) and Pat Keliher (USA) as its Vice-Chair (proposed by the representative of Canada), both for a period of two years, to commence from the close of the 2022 Annual Meeting.

5. Review of the 2021 Fishery and ACOM Report from ICES on Salmon Stocks in the Commission Area

- 5.1 The representative of ICES, Dennis Ensing, presented the scientific advice relevant to the North American Commission, as contained in the Report of the ICES Advisory Committee (ACOM), [CNL\(22\)09](#). Dr Ensing’s presentation is available as document [NAC\(22\)08](#) (Annex 4).

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

- 6.1 The Chair 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.
- 6.2 The Chair noted Canada had submitted its ‘Report of the 2021 Labrador Mixed-Stock Atlantic Salmon Fisheries,’ [NAC\(22\)03](#), and asked if Canada wished to present it. The representative of Canada indicated for the sake of time that he would forego making a presentation since the document had been available for review for some time.

- 6.3 The representative of the United States thanked Canada for its report. In response to a question from the United States regarding the identification of three U.S.-origin fish in the Labrador fishery, the representative of Canada indicated that further measures to limit interception of U.S.-origin fish were being discussed on the ground in Labrador between fisheries managers and fishers and will be known before the 2022 season in Labrador. Proposed mitigations included gear changes and changing net locations which are known to host U.S.-origin fish. The representative of the United States asked Canada to provide future updates to the United States on these efforts and Canada indicated that it would do so.

7. Sampling in the Labrador Fishery

- 7.1 The Chair recalled that information on the sampling programme had been provided in both the ICES report, [CNL\(22\)09](#), and the ‘Report of the 2021 Labrador Mixed-Stock Atlantic Salmon Fisheries,’ [NAC\(22\)03](#). She opened the floor for questions and comments.
- 7.2 The Commission agreed that, in future, Agenda items six and seven would be consolidated into one item given how closely related they are.
- 7.3 In response to a question, a representative of Canada, Martha Robertson, provided clarification that ‘reporting rate’ was calculated as the proportion of the tags reported in fisher’s catch logs relative to the total number of tags allocated to the fishery. This year, the tag reporting rate was 67 %. The reported catch was adjusted to reflect the total catch of all tags allocated. The representative of the United States thanked Canada for clarifying how the reporting rate was calculated and looked forward to Canada’s continued efforts to improve its reporting rate.
- 7.4 The representative of the United States noted appreciation for Canada’s continued efforts to implement the Labrador sampling programme and for Canada’s efforts to expand it in time and space to better detect rare-event, non-local stocks. In response to a question posed by the United States, Canada stated that it would continue its effort to achieve 10 % sampling effort of the Labrador fishery into the future.
- 7.5 The representative of the NGOs thanked Canada for its report and congratulated its efforts to increase monitoring of the Labrador fishery. He noted that the report is normally peer-reviewed through the ICES process but that has not happened this year. The representative of the NGOs requested that in the future the location of harvest of non-Labrador-origin Canadian salmon be shown on a map, similar to that which has been shown for U.S.-origin salmon.
- 7.6 A representative from ICES confirmed that data was provided to ICES in 2021, but that the analysis had not been conducted. This work would be undertaken and provided to the Commission in the next ICES report.

8. The St Pierre and Miquelon Salmon Fishery

- 8.1 The Chair reminded the Commission that in 2021, the Council agreed to write to France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon) to invite them to join NASCO. The letter emphasised how NASCO’s Implementation Plan process would enable France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon) to highlight their positive actions for salmon management. France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon) [replied on 22 April 2022](#) stating, among other things that:

‘France has, therefore, decided to strengthen the framework around the fishery

at St Pierre and Miquelon, shortening the fishing season to 1 May – 21 July and capping the number of recreational licenses issued at 80 in 2021... France therefore wishes to retain its status as observer to NASCO.'

- 8.2 The Chair thanked France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon) for providing the report on the Management and Sampling of the St Pierre and Miquelon Salmon Fishery, [CNL\(22\)20rev](#). She noted that the representative of France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon) had presented the report to Council and she opened the floor for questions and comments.
- 8.3 The representative of Canada thanked France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon) for its report and for its continued collaboration with NASCO. He noted that while the number of licences allocated to professional harvesters decreased in 2021, the total catch had increased. The representative of France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon) indicated that this was a local strategy. She indicated that more salmon was needed for food security purposes given recent experience with the pandemic and the challenges associated with depending on imports.
- 8.4 The representative of the United States thanked France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon) for its report and asked if there had been progress in replacing the gill net fishery with rod fishing. The representative of France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon) indicated that there had been delays in their pilot project as a result of Covid-19. The representative of France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon) indicated that it would continue to work with fishermen to trial this technique.
- 8.5 In response to a question posed by Canada, the representative of France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon) indicated that the 2021 sampling data had been provided to ICES and could be provided to NASCO, if requested. Those data indicated that 51 samples were collected in 2021, which was less than in the previous year, likely due to the impacts of Covid-19. Information on the results of the 2021 sampling programme is included in document NAC(22)10 (Annex 5). After reviewing this information, the representative of the United States asked if there would be an increase in the sampling effort in 2022, given that the level of sampling was low. The representative of France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon) reminded the United States that 2021 sampling effort was low due to Covid-19, and that this was a voluntary programme that required participation of fishers. The representative of France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon) indicated that the 2022 sampling programme was currently underway and anticipated that the number of samples would increase in 2022.
- 8.6 The representative of Canada expressed concern over the lack of an upper catch limit for recreational fishers in St Pierre and Miquelon. The representative of France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon) indicated that it would consider imposing catch limits to its recreational fishery, and noted the challenge and time required to shift the behaviour of fishers. The representative of France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon) stated a commitment to enforcing fisheries regulations and, upon request of the Chair, clarified that a full suite of measures was in place to enforce fisheries regulations, including fines and loss of licence.

9. Salmonid Introductions and Transfers

- 9.1 The Chair recalled 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 (see [NAC\(10\)6](#)). She stated her understanding that, prior to the Annual

Meeting, Canada and the United States shared draft Annual Reports for initial review and had exchanged questions on relevant issues, which were also discussed at an informal bilateral meeting. She noted that both Canada ([NAC\(22\)04rev](#)) and the United States ([NAC\(22\)06](#)) had tabled annual reports, which included as an annex the questions and answers considered inter-sessionally.

9.2 The Chair opened the floor for any additional discussion.

9.3 The representative of the United States asked the following question: Regarding Canada's Infectious Salmon Anaemia (ISA) monitoring at aquaculture facilities, is sampling conducted lethally? If a positive result is detected, what is the procedure regarding other salmon within the same facility?

9.4 Canada responded in writing as follows:

In the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), each site is sampled on a monthly and quarterly basis, but may also be targeted for more active sampling. Lethal sampling is completed on five moribund fish at each sampling event. If there is a detection the site is immediately quarantined and a number of protocols enacted. Depending on further testing the site may be depopulated, equipment removed, and fallowed.

In the Province of Nova Scotia (NS), the following applies in terms of Infectious Salmon Anaemia virus (ISAv) surveillance:

- *There is a described minimum number of three mandatory veterinary site visits and sampling/testing that must occur within a calendar year and a minimum number of samples/testing that occurs during each visit. The number of fish sampled and tested during each visit is based on a Risk Based Sample Size, Using a Stochastic Analysis (RBSA) Epitool program. The RBSA is an Epitool used to calculate the sample size required to demonstrate freedom from disease. The analysis incorporates disease prevalence, moribund sampling, diagnostic sensitivity and specificity, and historical surveillance data from the population being examined.*
- *One of these three mandatory visits will be carried out by a Provincial Aquatic Animal veterinarian from the Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture (NSDFA), while the other two may be carried out by a private designated veterinarian that the facility identifies. These samples are lethally sampled, and virus culture would be completed on all samples, and ISAv is one of many of the viruses the cell lines would screen for.*

A sample size of 20 individual moribund animals is the goal for testing. If 20 ideal samples (moribunds) cannot be collected, a minimum of 5 fish must be collected during a fish health surveillance visit. Sample priority will be given to moribund fish samples. If moribund fish or fresh dead samples are not suitable for collection, then 5 healthy fish must be collected for necropsy analysis and testing. Sample collection should be done in such a way to be representative of the whole aquaculture site. This would include multiple samples (if possible) from as many holding units as are present at the marine aquaculture site. The veterinarian must perform a necropsy on all fish collected, recording all gross pathological findings. While it is the case that the sampling is lethal, in this instance, it is the use of kidney samples sent for ISAv screening, through a polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) test for all moribund samples collected.

In the Province of New Brunswick (NB), site visits are generally conducted in conjunction with routine mortality dives. Samples are selected from the mortalities that are retrieved during the mort dive. Moribund or fresh dead fish are considered to be

appropriate samples. At each surveillance site visit, a minimum of five and a maximum of twenty fish should be collected. If the minimum of five fish samples cannot be obtained, additional sampling may be required at the request of the Provincial Aquaculture Veterinarian (NBPAV). The Designated Aquaculture Veterinarian (DAV) or their designate must conduct a gross post mortem examination on each fish and prepare samples for laboratory submission in an aseptic manner as outlined below. When sampling from a suspect or positive site, a veterinarian should, if possible perform the post-mortem exam.

In most circumstances, the first occurrence of a positive RT-PCR on a site will result in at least one of the positive RT-PCRs being tested for strain type. Subsequent positive results in other cages on the same site will also be tested for strain type, at a minimum of 1 per cage. Additional strain typing would be done at the discretion of the NBPAV.

In the event of a positive ISAv detection, the laboratory will directly notify both the NBPAV and the CFIA, as per federal protocol related to the detection of a federally reportable disease. The NBPAV will report the details of the positive sample to the CFIA and all DAVs operating in the NB Bay of Fundy. The NBPAV may order strain typing of the sample if deemed necessary. Once the strain typing results are received by the Provincial Department of Agriculture, Aquaculture, and Fisheries (NBAAF) they are reported to DAVs and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and State of Maine officials. NBDAAF, the USDA and all NBDAVs exchange weekly ISAv reports and positive detection notifications. The NBAAF positive detection notifications are also sent to State of Maine officials. A communications protocol has been developed and agreed to by the USDA, the Province of New Brunswick and companies operating in the New Brunswick and Maine sides of the Bay of Fundy to share all ISA surveillance test results, as they are operating in shared waters within close proximity to one another, and it is in the best interest of all parties to be informed of any possible disease situations.

As per Section 25 of the Aquaculture Act, the licence holder must submit by email, to the NBDAAF Registrar of Aquaculture the “Monthly Fish Health Assessment” report within seven days of the beginning of each month for the prior month. The NBPAV will review the reports. The license holder must report to the NBPAV the presence of ISA or ISAv.

- 9.5 The representative of the United States expressed concern over the stocking of triploid salmon, recently approved in Placentia Bay, Newfoundland, noting, in particular, that they may be at higher risk of contracting and spreading ISA. She asked for further information on any measures that were being or could be taken by Canada to minimise this risk. Canada noted that its response to the second NGO question below partially addressed this question.
- 9.6 The representative of the NGOs asked Canada a number of questions. The questions and responses are as follows:
- 9.7 Question 1. As per Canada’s report to the NAC, Canada has now approved, in violation of Williamsburg Resolution Article 5, the importation of ~33,000 reproductively viable European salmon for use in Grieg’s Placentia Bay salmon farming operation. With Canada accepting a triploidy rate as low as 95%, many hundreds of thousands more reproductively viable European salmon will end up in sea cages in Placentia Bay over the life of the project. The MoU between Canada and Newfoundland for aquaculture development prohibits the province of Newfoundland from making any regulations

protecting wild fish or fisheries. What steps has Canada taken and / or will take to prevent these European salmon from damaging Threatened wild Atlantic salmon populations in Placentia Bay?

- 9.8 *Canada's response: As noted previously, a risk assessment was completed prior to authorizing the import of all female, triploid eggs into Canada. A recent science advisory process conducted by the Canadian Science Advisory Secretariat (CSAS) clearly states that, considering the existing management and regulatory measures in place, there is no genetic risk to wild Atlantic Salmon if triploidy is equal to or greater than 95%. Canada and the Province have established a sampling protocol whereby the company provides third party triploidy test results for review prior to authorizing the transfer of smolt to marine sites in Placentia Bay. There has only been one transfer to marine sites to date and the triploidy results were 99.4.*
- 9.9 Question 2. Canada's report to the NAC indicates that the first batch of Grieg's juvenile salmon had to be destroyed because ISA was detected in a sample of parr. Those juveniles were contained in a biosecure land-based freshwater facility using aquifer water, so the ISA could not have been picked up from the environment. This suggests the ISA came in with the eggs from Europe. What has Canada done to investigate the source of ISA in those fish and to ensure that no further infected fish are imported or put into sea cages?
- 9.10 *Canada's response: Atlantic salmon are listed on the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's (CFIA) list of Susceptible species of aquatic animals that require a permit and zoosanitary certification when imported into Canada for aquaculture purposes. If there is a detection of a regulated disease associated with imported animals, the CFIA will conduct an investigation to confirm the detection and, if confirmed, will follow-up with the country of export to advise on the finding. There can be a range of disease response actions that can be undertaken depending on the specific disease detected (foreign animal versus enzootic disease), and the health status of the zone of destination within Canada.*
- 9.11 Question 3. In response to the United States' acknowledgement that aquaculture escape events of less than 50 fish are not considered reportable events, the representative of Canada asked the United States if 'any consideration has been given to lowering the thresholds of a 'reportable escape' to ensure regulators are aware of even less significant escape events and help better address potential causes?' The NGOs note that the Canadian province of New Brunswick also does not require suspected escapes of less than 50 fish to be reported. Therefore, in light of the federal government's exclusive jurisdiction over the protection of wild fish and fisheries, the NGOs pose a similar question to Canada: Why does Canada not require New Brunswick to lower the threshold of a 'reportable escape' to ensure regulators are aware of even less significant escape events and help better address potential causes?
- 9.12 *Canada's response: The province of New Brunswick (NB) is the lead aquaculture regulator with the authority to license aquaculture operations and authorize the allocation of space (i.e., leases) for aquaculture operations, including setting escape reporting thresholds. The NB Aquaculture Act (2019) and associated regulations and included codes require immediate reporting of escapes of more than 50 fish. It also requires the monthly reporting of any fish losses through the monthly animal health reporting. Canada will continue to work with all Atlantic provincial partners to standardize escape reporting and to help mitigate escapes and potential impacts.*

- 9.13 The representative of the NGOs stated that the Annual Report from the United States indicates that Norwegian sequence ISA_v was detected in an adult salmon collected from the Penobscot River. He asked whether the United States had any further information or hypotheses as to how this fish contracted the Norwegian strain of ISA.
- 9.14 The representative of the United States stated that the United States had looked into the issue, and they confirmed the ISA strain was Norwegian, but it is not possible to trace back to where the fish picked up the virus.

10. Announcement of the Tag Return Incentive Scheme Prize

- 10.1 The winner of the North American Commission £1,000 prize in the NASCO Tag Return Incentive Scheme is John McCarthy, Juniper, New Brunswick, Canada.
- 10.2 The tag was placed on a large salmon returning to the Northwest Miramichi River (New Brunswick, Canada) in 2016. The fish was captured on 2 June 2016 at the estuary trap net in Cassilis operated by Fisheries and Oceans Canada as part of the assessment programme 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 91.5 cm fork length and the salmon was identified as a wild female, based on external characteristics. It was recaptured during the recreational fishery on 8 July 2019 in the Southwest Miramichi River at Halfmoon Pool. It was subsequently released by the angler as there have been mandatory catch and release measures in place for large Atlantic salmon since 1984.

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

- 11.1 The Commission agreed to defer the decision on the Request to ICES for Scientific Advice to the Council. The request to ICES, as agreed by Council, is contained in document CNL(22)13 (Annex 6).

12. Other Business

- 12.1 There was no other business.

13. Date and Place of the Next Meeting

- 13.1 The Commission agreed to hold its next Annual Meeting at the same time and place as the Fortieth Annual Meeting of the Council.

14. Report of the Meeting

- 14.1 The Commission agreed a report of the Meeting.

15. Close of the Meeting

- 15.1 After sincerely thanking the Secretariat for their hard work in supporting the meeting and the members of the Commission for their contributions, the Chair closed the meeting.