

	<p><b>West Greenland Commission</b></p> <p><i>Report of the Thirty-Ninth Annual Meeting of the West Greenland Commission of the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization</i></p>	<p><b>WGC(22)12</b></p>
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***Report of the Thirty-Ninth Annual Meeting of the West Greenland 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, Stephen Gephard (USA), opened the meeting and welcomed delegates.
- 1.2 The representatives of the Canada, Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) (DFG), and the United States provided written Opening Statements (Annex X).
- 1.3 The representative of the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) did not provide a written Opening Statement. He referenced Opening Statements from previous meetings and said that the views of the NGOs had not changed.
- 1.4 A list of participants at the Thirty-Ninth Annual Meetings of the Council and Commissions of NASCO is included as Annex X.

**2. Adoption of the Agenda**

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

**3. Nomination of a Rapporteur**

- 3.1 Alan Walker (UK) was appointed Rapporteur.

**4. Election of Officers**

- 4.1 The Commission re-elected Stephen Gephard (USA) as its Chair (proposed by the representative of DFG, seconded by the representative of UK) for a period of two years, to commence from the close of the 2022 Annual Meeting.
- 4.2 The Commission re-elected Katrine Kærgaard (DFG) as its Vice-Chair (proposed by the representative of EU, seconded by the representative of Canada) for a period of two years, to commence from the close of the 2022 Annual Meeting.

**5. ACOM Report from ICES on Salmon Stocks in the Commission Area**

- 5.1 A representative of ICES, Dennis Ensing, presented the scientific advice contained in the ICES Advisory Committee (ACOM) report, [CNL\(22\)09](#). Dr Ensing's presentation on the advice relevant to the West Greenland Commission is available as document [WGC\(22\)13](#) (Annex X).

## **6. Report of the Inter-Sessional Meetings of the West Greenland Commission**

- 6.1 The Chair noted that in 2021 the West Greenland Commission agreed a one year ‘Interim Regulatory Measure for Fishing for Atlantic Salmon at West Greenland in 2021’, [WGC\(21\)18](#). Therefore, discussions on a new regulatory measure to apply to the fishery from 2022 took place inter-sessionally. The Chair advised that there had been three inter-sessional meetings of the Commission since the 2021 Annual Meeting. In December 2021 ([WGC\(21\)22](#)) and April 2022 ([WGC\(22\)04](#)) the Commission considered the West Greenland Atlantic salmon fishery in 2021 and the progress made in implementing the interim regulatory measure. Additionally, as agreed at the April Inter-Sessional Meeting, a number of meetings of the Commission’s Heads of Delegations had taken place in May. The Heads of Delegations had considered a Draft Regulatory Measure submitted to them by DFG.
- 6.2 The Chair introduced the process followed during the June Inter-Sessional Meeting (WGC(22)06), where two Working Groups had been tasked to (i) conduct a retrospective analysis of the catch data to examine the percentage catch reported that would have achieved a 100% TAC uptake after all catch reports had been recorded, and (ii) a further discussion of the draft Regulatory Measure text. The Chair had tabled the revised draft Regulatory Measure paper, noting that there were several sections that had explicitly not been agreed, but also that whole document remained a draft.
- 6.3 The two Working Groups reported to the Commission on the progress made. The ‘Data Working Group’ noted that they were making progress but were unable to finalise their task. They agreed to continue their efforts after the inter-sessional meeting and agreed to report back to the Commission during the Annual Meeting. The Chair provided an overview of the progress made by the ‘Text Working Group’. The Commission discussed many of the suggested edits, and edits were accepted as appropriate. A number of issues still remained, and the Chair agreed to finalise the draft document and use the draft as a starting point for continued discussions on the regulatory measure during the Annual Meeting of the Commission.

## **7. Mixed-Stock Fisheries Conducted by Members of the Commission**

- 7.1 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.
- 7.2 The Chair referred the Commission to the papers submitted by Canada ([NAC\(22\)03](#)), the European Union ([NEA\(22\)07](#)) and the UK ([NEA\(22\)06](#)). These provided a description of the MSFs still operating in their jurisdictions, the most recent catch data, any updates to the Implementation Plans (IPs) relating to MSFs and any changes or developments in the management of MSFs in the IP period to implement NASCO’s agreements. The United States did not report as there are no directed wild Atlantic salmon fisheries in the United States. The Commission welcomed these reports.

## **8. Regulatory Measures**

- 8.1 The Commission considered the Revised Proposed Draft Regulatory Measure for Fishing for Atlantic Salmon at West Greenland (Tabled by the Chair), WGC(22)05rev.
- 8.2 The Chair invited a representative of the ‘Data Working Group’ to present their

findings. The presentation is annexed to this report but summarised as follows. (Please note that some values included in the presentation were revised slightly by the Data Working Group after the presentation. The preliminary values as presented are noted below, whereas the final values are provided in the Working Group's presentation (Annex XX)).

- 8.3 The task was to conduct a retrospective analysis of the 2018-2021 fishery data to determine what level of percentage TAC uptake would have triggered a fishery closure that resulted in the final catch matching the TAC, given reporting delays by fishers and data entry and processing delays. Data from the 2018 fishery were not readily available. The data for the 2019-2021 fisheries consisted of catch weight, catch date, registration date, license type (professional, private), management area (West Greenland in 2019, 2020; Northwest and Southwest Greenland in 2021) and TAC (whole area for 2019, 2020; separate for fishing type / management areas in 2021). Data for the Kapissillit river and for East Greenland were excluded from the analysis.
- 8.4 The analytical process was demonstrated using data from the 2021 Southwest professional fishery segment. Catch date is when the fish is caught, but registration date is when the catch is entered into the official database. The catch date and registration date often differ because the submitted catch data are often delayed given data reporting and data entry processes and therefore lag behind the actual catch date by a varying number of days. According to the catch data, the TAC was reached on 8 September. As it was assumed that fishery closure notification would need to be posted three days prior to the targeted closure date, the 100% TAC date was backdated by three days to identify the date when the fishery closure would need to be announced. The registered catch as a percentage of TAC on 5 September was 58% (hereafter the 'trigger percentage'). According to the data, if the fishery closure was initiated on 5 September the total harvest for that fishery would have been approximately 100% of the TAC.
- 8.5 This process was followed for the available years, fishing types and management areas. The trigger percentages were as follows: 2019 – 54%, 2020 – 6%, 2021: NW professional 13%, NW recreational 100%, SW professional 56%, SW recreational 60%. The average of the four percentages in 2021 57%, whereas the average weighted by TAC was 50%. The overall (2019-2021) average was 39%, and 41% when weighted by TAC.
- 8.6 Several caveats to the analysis were recognised: (i) the data were only for three fishery years, within which time period there were two different management approaches; (ii) these historic, best available data are indicative but cannot be guaranteed to indicate the future dynamics. The addition of data in the future should improve the predictive power of such analyses; (iii) the analysis was based on the fishery catching 100% of the TAC and therefore the analysis identified the day after 100% was reached as the basis for determining the trigger percentage, but another percentage could be used; (iv) a different closure notification period could be applied; and (v) minor data issues were recognised, that could be resolved with more time, but were not considered to have a material effect on the overall message.
- 8.7 The presentation concluded with an illustration of scenario testing for applying the various trigger percentages to the 2021 catch data series. The lowest trigger percentage of 16% might have yielded in a total TAC uptake of 58%; the highest trigger percentage of 81% might have yielded in an uptake of 145%; the 48% trigger percentage based on the weighted average might have led to an uptake of 114%. The Chair invited questions on the analytical approach.

- 8.8 The representative of the NGOs sought clarification on how the catch registration date was taken into account, noting that this would be the information that DFG would use as the basis for their management decision. The representative of the Data Working Group clarified that the trigger percentages presented were based on the catch registration dates.
- 8.9 The representative of the NGOs asked that the presentation could be revised so the terms used were consistent with those used by DFG, specifically to replace 'commercial' with 'professional'.
- 8.10 The representative of DFG thanked the Data Working Group for their efforts and noted that the presentation provided a good visual illustration of how difficult it was to manage the fishery to achieve a final catch exactly meeting the TAC. She noted that DFG would continue to learn from these data and analyses and hoped that at the end of the five-year Management Plan, the fishery reporting and management would be better at closing the fishery at the right time. However, she noted that a sunny weekend could change everything.
- 8.11 The representative of the United States reflected that from her recollection, several members around the table considered that the 90% upper limit in an earlier version of the draft regulatory measure was too high and noted that the values presented confirmed that view, even when taking account of the variability in trigger percentages. She suggested the Commission might consider whether to aim to develop a single trigger percentage for the entire fishery, or separate trigger percentages per fishery type / management area. She proposed the use of separate trigger percentages in the first year, as these would be the most precautionary. The trigger percentage developed by the Data Working Group should be used as an upper limit in the implementation of the regulatory measure.
- 8.12 The representative of the UK noted that the presentation was very insightful. Responding to the question from the representative of the United States, she suggested that DFG might wish to clarify that it was comfortable with using a trigger percentage as a reference point for closing the fishery.
- 8.13 The representative of DFG reminded the Commission that Greenland was not willing to include a payback clause in the regulatory measure and so the trigger percentage was their proposed way forward, unless other members of the Commission had any alternative suggestions.
- 8.14 The representative of Canada recognised that the work had been very valuable in allowing the discussions of the Commission to proceed based on real data rather than on speculation, and that Canada was in favour of proceeding with this approach.
- 8.15 The representative of Canada cautioned that the members of the Commission should not lose sight of the three key quantitative elements of the negotiation, those being the weight of the TAC, the trigger percentage(s) and the time period of a new regulatory measure.
- 8.16 The representative of Canada referred back to the scenario testing slide in the Data Working Group presentation and observed that although the weighted average trigger of 48% might have led to an overharvest in the region of 114%, he proposed that the trigger percentage should be around this level.
- 8.17 The representative of the UK supported Canada, noting that the analyses suggested a relatively low figure would be necessary to give confidence of no overharvest.

Responding to the proposal from the United States for fishing type / management area specific trigger percentages, she asked whether DFG had a preference.

- 8.18 The representative of DFG expressed their preference for an overall trigger percentage with some flexibility. She noted that the management responsibility remains with the Government of Greenland, and that separate trigger percentages might be viewed by some as micromanagement that would not be well received in Greenland. She also noted their need for flexibility to allow for variable conditions affecting the fishery, such as weather conditions.
- 8.19 The representative of the EU noted that recognising the variability in the results of the scenario testing, a trigger percentage of around 50% seemed reasonable. He supported DFG in wishing to avoid micromanagement. The representative of the UK expressed the same position as Canada.
- 8.20 The representative of the United States recognised progress had been made by the Commission last year to support a TAC for a single year, with the agreement that it should not be greater than 27 tonnes. However, she noted that the TAC and trigger percentage are inter-related, and as such, the position of the United States on the size of the TAC is dependent on the trigger percentage agreed. The representative of the EU agreed the two numbers were inter-related but stated that they could accept 27 tonnes but this could be related to the trigger percentage to provide confidence to the Commission members.
- 8.21 The representative of DFG stated that, as last year, the minimum possible TAC acceptable to Greenland was for 27 tonnes for the West Greenland fishery, plus three tonnes for the East Greenland fishery. The total of 30 tonnes is considered by Greenland as the minimum acceptable for its subsistence fishery providing food for people across Greenland.
- 8.22 During extensive discussions, agreement was reached on important aspects of the regulatory measure: specifically, a Total Allowable Catch of no more than 27 tonnes; that there would be a multi-year measure; and, that in the first year (i.e. 2022) the fishery at West Greenland would be closed when the registered catch reached no more than 49% of the overall TAC.
- 8.23 During discussions on paragraph 5 of the regulatory measure, the representative of Canada asked the representative of DFG to explain how they interpreted this paragraph by explaining how this would be actioned by DFG during the fishing season. The representative of DFG explained that the governance process for creation of public announcements for closure of the fisheries had been changed in order to allow for faster closure of the fishery. The closure percentage for each component of the fishery would be estimated pre-season for each management area and further adjusted according to relevant parameters such as weather forecast, observed and expected reporting lag, etc.
- 8.24 The representative of Canada sought further clarification regarding paragraph 5 of the regulatory measure on how DFG would consult with Commission members when the closure percentage was under consideration for adjustment. The representative of DFG responded by clarifying that the data would be presented in the annual report on the fishery, to be reviewed by the Commission, and based on that review, discussions on the percentage could take place.
- 8.25 The Commission agreed to adopt the Multi-Annual Regulatory Measure for Fishing for Atlantic Salmon at West Greenland, [WGC\(22\)10](#).

## **9. Frequency of Reporting on the West Greenland Salmon Fishery**

9.1 The Chair noted that DFG had requested that the West Greenland Commission consider their proposal for a reduction in the number of reports it submits to the Commission each year. In a letter to the Commission, [WGC\(21\)06](#), DFG stated:

*‘... one single report that covers all relevant issues would reduce not only the burden on Greenland but also on the West Greenland Commission and it would ensure stronger reporting for discussion at the West Greenland Commission meetings.’*

9.2 The representative of DFG noted the efforts implemented to manage the fishery, and that there was a management plan in place for five years. She therefore asked the Commission to agree to a single comprehensive report per year.

9.3 The representative of the UK supported the use of a single report but requested clarification on the timing of the delivery of this report.

9.4 The representative of the DFG proposed to continue the February report schedule as in recent years.

9.5 The representative of the United States supported DFG’s proposal, providing that DFG would inform the Commission of any proposed changes in its regulation of the fishery.

9.6 The Commission agreed that DFG would provide the Commission with an Annual Report, scheduled in February as per recent practice.

## **10. Sampling in the West Greenland Fishery**

10.1 The Chair noted that the members of the West Greenland Commission had worked co-operatively over the past five decades to collect biological data on Atlantic salmon harvested at West Greenland. These data provide critical inputs to the stock assessments conducted annually by the ICES Working Group on North Atlantic Salmon.

10.2 A representative of the United States, Tim Sheehan, provided details on the West Greenland Fishery Sampling Programme in 2020 and 2021.

10.3 The representative of DFG noted that 67 citizens provided samples in 2021 from the West Greenland fishery. She noted that DFG planned to provide additional support to citizen sampling in 2022, for example including a prize or incentive scheme.

10.4 The representative of the NGOs asked whether the salmon captured during the satellite tracking study would be included in the sampling database. Mr Sheehan explained that this was not done yet, because these fish are not from the West Greenland Fishery per se. However, this would be considered by the ICES Working Group on North Atlantic Salmon (WGNAS) for inclusion in the report provided in 2023.

10.5 Tim Sheehan introduced the ‘Draft Statement of Co-operation on the West Greenland Fishery Sampling Programme for 2022’, [WGC\(22\)08](#).

10.6 The Commission agreed to adopt a ‘Statement of Co-operation on the West Greenland Fishery Sampling Programme for 2022’, [WGC\(22\)11](#) (Annex X).

## **11. Announcement of the Tag Return Incentive Scheme Prize**

11.1 The Chair announced that the winner of the West Greenland Commission £1,000 prize in the NASCO Tag Return Incentive Scheme was Isboseth Jensen from Qaqortoq, Greenland.

11.2 The tag was placed on a wild adult female salmon returning to the Margaree River (Nova Scotia, Canada) in 2021. The fish was captured as broodstock and spawned by the Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture and externally marked with a light blue Carlin tag as part of the Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) assessment programme for Atlantic salmon in the Margaree River. The tag was recaptured in the Qaqortoq region, the whole weight was estimated as 4.5 kg. The tag was provided directly to the Greenland Institute of Natural Resources by the fisher.

## **12. Recommendations to the Council on the Request to ICES for Scientific Advice**

12.1 The Commission agreed to defer the decision on the Request to ICES for Scientific Advice to the Council.

## **13. Other Business**

13.1 The representative of the United States provided a closing statement, as follows:

*‘Mr. Chair, Madam Secretary, Distinguished Delegates, Observers, Ladies and Gentlemen:*

*We would like to take this opportunity to express our deep appreciation to the members of the West Greenland Commission for their spirit of cooperation in finding a way forward on a multi-annual regulatory measure this year. It has been a difficult road to get to this point, but the United States is satisfied with the result. The cooperation and openness shown by all over the last days and weeks led us to find innovative approaches that helped us bridge our differences with regard to the management of the fishery. Kudos, in particular, go to the ad hoc Data Working Group. Without their hard work to find a science-based approach to support informed decision-making, we would not be where we are. From our perspective, the commitment of all the members to find a solution has been clearly on display and has been supported immeasurably by the fact that we have finally been able to work together in person. We look forward to seeing how the very creative approaches taken in this multilateral management measure will work in practice.*

*Thank you, Mr. Chair.’*

13.2 The representative of the UK supported the closing statement from the United States and appreciated the spirit of the negotiations. The representatives of the EU, Canada and DFG similarly supported the statement.

13.3 The representative of the NGO provided a closing statement.

*‘The NGOs wish to thank the Commission for allowing our participation in mostly open deliberations, both within the intersessional and annual meetings of this Commission. We are however disappointed that the level of quota agreed is the same as in the previous year, considering the precarious state of many of the salmon stocks in North America and Southern Europe that contribute to this fishery. We also felt that quota reduction to a much lower number was warranted as a result of the overages of quota that occurred during the past four years.*

*We welcome the new closure mechanism introduced in the agreed regulatory measure that should lead to better quota control and are anxious to review the results, as soon as possible, after the fishery closes in the fall of 2022.’*

#### **14. Date and Place of the Next Meeting**

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

#### **15. Report of the Meeting**

- 15.1 The Commission agreed a report of its Meeting.

#### **16. Close of the Meeting**

- 16.1 The Chair thanked the members of the Commission and observers for their contributions and closed the Thirty-Ninth Annual Meeting of the West Greenland Commission.