



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910
THE DIRECTOR

January 4, 2023

Mr. Arnaud Peyronnet
President
North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization
11 Rutland Square
Edinburgh EH1 2AS
Scotland, UK

Dear Mr. Peyronnet:

Thank you for your letter regarding the status of the U. S. Implementation Plan (IP) for the Third Reporting Cycle (2019-2024). In your letter, you note that the U.S. IP remains deficient in the section related to Aquaculture, Introductions, Transfers, and Transgenics. Specifically, the IP Review Group concluded that the United States has not provided sufficient information or an acceptable action that demonstrates progress towards attainment of NASCO's goal of 100 percent of farms having effective sea lice management such that there is no increase in sea lice loads or lice-induced mortality of wild salmonids.

Let me assure you that the United States is committed to NASCO's IP process and to meeting NASCO's goals with regard to sea lice. As we reported to NASCO in a November 2020 letter, we have a stringent monitoring, control, and enforcement regime for pathogens and sea lice in salmon aquaculture. We consider that this program is sufficient in meeting NASCO's goals for sea lice. That said, we are always seeking ways strengthen our program, and, as previously notified to NASCO through the IP process, we have identified five steps we plan to take in the fight against sea lice, as follows:

1. Explore the efficacy, cost, and resource requirements to conduct plankton trawls in areas with and without aquaculture net pens to determine if there is a significant difference in sea lice presence in the water column associated with aquaculture facilities.
2. Explore the efficacy, cost, and resource requirements to employ sentinel cage studies to quantify sea lice loads on wild salmonids in areas with and without aquaculture facilities.
3. Contingent upon the efficacy assessments noted above and securing the required resources, conduct one or both studies specified in items (1) and (2) above with a view to enhancing the assessment of sea lice presence and its impacts on wild salmonids.
4. Review the results of the study or studies to evaluate, in particular, potential impacts of sea lice loads on wild salmonids in areas proximate to net pens.
5. If appropriate, secure resources necessary to implement these or other additional monitoring approaches in the long-term to enhance information on sea lice loads and improve U.S reporting to NASCO concerning the achievement of NASCO's goals for sea lice management.

In our 2022 Annual Progress Report (CNL(22)28), we also described ongoing work in developing a decision support tool to guide aquaculture sea lice management in the United States and to expand on the existing knowledge base of sea lice biology and distribution in Cobscook

THE ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR
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and Passamaquoddy Bay—places where aquaculture is most active. The goal of this effort is to better understand the seasonal abundance and distribution of sea lice within these areas in order to better manage and reduce sea lice loads in commercial aquaculture.

We will keep NASCO informed of our progress regarding the actions discussed above, which will provide us with the additional data needed to more clearly demonstrate progress towards attainment of NASCO’s goal for sea lice, as identified by the IP Review Group. In that regard, we have a meeting planned for late January to review progress on the decision support tool to guide sea lice management and to continue discussions on options to implement the five steps described above.

If you have any questions, please contact

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Sincerely,

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