

	<p><b>North American Commission</b></p> <p><i>Report of the Forty-First Annual Meeting of the North American Commission of the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization</i></p>	<p><b>NAC(24)08</b></p>
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***Report of the Forty-First Annual Meeting of the North American Commission of the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization***

**1. Opening of the Meeting**

- 1.1 The Chair, Isabelle Morisset (Canada), opened the meeting and welcomed delegates.
- 1.2 Canada and the United States submitted written Opening Statements (Annex 1).
- 1.3 A list of participants at the Forty-First 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\(24\)06](#) (Annex 3).

**3. Nomination of a Rapporteur**

- 3.1 Kellie Foster-Taylor (USA) was appointed as Rapporteur.

**4. Report of the ICES Advisory Committee on Salmon Stocks in the Commission Area**

- 4.1 The Chair reminded delegates that the ICES advice for North Atlantic Salmon Stocks was issued on 10 May 2024, [CNL\(24\)06](#). She noted that in 2022 the Council had agreed that full ICES Advice should be presented only in Council, in future.
- 4.2 The Chair of the Working Group on North Atlantic Salmon (WGNAS), Alan Walker (UK), had presented the report of the Advisory Committee (ACOM) to Council and this presentation is available as document CNL(24)56. Dr Walker attended the NAC meeting to answer questions relevant to the Commission. There were none.

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

- 5.1 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’, it was agreed that there should be an agenda item in each of the Commissions to allow for a focus on mixed-stock fisheries.
- 5.2 The Chair reminded the Commission that in 2022 it had been agreed that the Agenda items ‘Mixed-Stock Fisheries Conducted by Members of the Commission’ and ‘Sampling in the Labrador Fishery’, previously taken separately, would be consolidated into one item given how closely related they were.
- 5.3 The Chair thanked Canada for its paper ‘Labrador Subsistence Food Fisheries – Mixed-Stock Fisheries Context Paper’, [NAC\(24\)03](#). The United States did not provide a report because it has no directed wild Atlantic salmon fisheries.
- 5.4 The NGO Co-Chair asked whether the percentage of sampling for the 2023 Labrador fishery was 8.7 % or 4.7 %. Canada clarified that the ICES report had a different reported sampling rate to the rate included in Labrador’s mixed-stock fishery report. The ICES report covers sampling done for all fishing areas in Labrador including Lake

Melville and shows a sampling rate of 4.7 %. The mixed-stock fishery report for the North American Commission excludes samples taken from Lake Melville so the reporting rate is for the sampling done within the mixed stock fishing zones which had a sampling rate of 8.7 %. Detailed sampling information is provided in the Canadian mixed-stock fishery report. The NGO Co-Chair asked about the target for increasing sampling above 10 %, given that the Labrador fishery had reported the highest catches since 2022. Canada responded that 10 % is the objective and it put forth its best efforts to meet the objective. Although the sampling in the mixed-stock fishing areas is not as high as Canada would like, the sampling is done by willing partners and the nature of working in such a northern area presents a challenge in efforts to improve sampling rates.

## **6. The St Pierre and Miquelon Salmon Fishery**

- 6.1 The Chair noted that the Commission had been concerned about catches of salmon at St Pierre and Miquelon for some time. Although low, this catch occurred at a time when there are serious concerns about the abundance of North American stocks and when strict harvest restrictions had been introduced throughout the North American Commission area. She also noted that the President of NASCO had [written](#) to France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon) in December 2022 and that a [response](#) had been received to that letter dated 29 August 2023. The NASCO President had [responded](#) to this letter on 20 March 2024. No response had yet been received to this letter.
- 6.2 The Chair thanked France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon) for providing the report on the 2023 ‘Management and Sampling of the St Pierre and Miquelon Salmon Fishery’, [CNL\(24\)22](#).
- 6.3 In advance of the Annual Meeting, Canada submitted the following questions to France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon):

*Q1 ‘Canada is pleased with the reduction in professional harvest and the actions that St Pierre and Miquelon has taken to increase the number of inspections in 2023. However, we are disappointed that recreational catch has increased once again despite a welcome reduction in 2022, and the establishment of various voluntary measures over the last few years. Canada would be grateful if France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon) could respond to the following questions pertaining to their 2023 fishery report.*

- *We would like to reiterate our question on whether SPM has plans to reduce the number of recreational permits/licenses issued to recreational fishers.’*

***Response from France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon):*** ‘The quota of 80 licences is already a result from the cooperation between local administration and recreational fishermen.

*If the subject comes up again, we will look into it with recreational fishermen. It can be noted that fishing permits not used by the owner for three consecutive years are not renewed.’*

*Q2 ‘SPM’s 2022 fishery report indicated that four professional permits were issued in 2022, whereas six permits were issued to professional fishers in 2023. At the 2023 NAC meeting, France (in respect of SPM) had indicated that it would not reallocate professional licences when the current holder*

*no longer fished professionally. Are professional licences renewed annually? If so, why were two additional professional licences issued in 2023?’*

**Response from France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon):** *‘The 2022 report states that 4 licenses were allowed, while the prefectural decree allowed 6 licenses. In the 2022 report, we had indicated only 4, because only 4 professional fishermen had actually put their nets in the water and fished. We will make sure to be more consistent in future years. We have 6 professional licenses for some time now. This figure is not subject to quota, and if any professional fisherman wish to apply to salmon fishing in the next years, we will consider their applications.*

*It is also important to remember that professional salmon fishing is a secondary activity for fishermen. No professional fishermen carries out this activity as a principal activity.’*

**Q3** *‘On page 12 the report reads: “voluntarily restricting the fishing season to 1 May – 21 July each year, despite the regulations allowing the fishery to be open from 1 May – 31 July”. How is this a voluntary measure when the regulatory framework establishes that the fishery season is restricted to 1 May – 21 July (page 8)?’*

**Response from France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon):** *‘In the interest of conserving the resource, recreational fishermen and the administration have decided in the prefectural decrees which are issued each year to open the campaign only between May 1 and July 21, which reduces the number of fishing days. A new modification of the dates is currently under discussion with the president of the association of recreational fishermen.’*

**Q4** *‘Could France (in respect of SPM) please provide more information on the types of at-sea inspections that the new monitoring vessel (the KILDA) will be conducting, starting in 2024?’*

**Response from France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon):** *‘Since the first of June 2024, the maritime and port affairs department of the Saint-Pierre & Miquelon has a new nautical vessel, the KILDA. The KILDA will be used for water protection, rescue and control purposes. Actually, controls are carried out on salmon landings, but for the 2024 season, controls will be carried out at sea. The control rate has not yet been set. This is the first year in which this method is used, its use needs to be clearly defined. The fisheries control plan is currently being adopted.’*

**Q5** *‘Last year France indicated that there was a voluntary pilot project to replace net fishing by trolling for recreational fishers. Could France indicate the results of this project and plans to phase out net fishing for recreational fishers?’*

**Response from France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon):** *‘As for trolling, the results were not conclusive. At this stage, the switch for net fishing to another type of fishery, more selective, is still under consideration by researchers. But we would like to underline the real willingness of recreational fishermen to move towards more selective fishing in the long term.’*

- 6.4 Canada had no additional questions for France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon) but offered the following observation:

*‘Canada would like to thank France for the report on the St Pierre and Miquelon salmon fishery, and for their responses to questions during the correspondence period.*

*We’re pleased to see a reduction in the professional harvest in the 2023 fishery compared to the harvest in the previous year.*

*Nevertheless, we need to point out there are no such commercial or professional fisheries in Canada, in United States or in most of NASCO’s Contracting Parties. In Canada the commercial fishery was stopped 24 years ago in order to conserve Atlantic salmon in eastern North America. Given the proximity of Saint Pierre and Miquelon to Canada, 15km, the professional fishery does affect stocks from Canada. This lack of opportunity for access to Atlantic salmon imposes hardship on Canadian harvesters, which is compounded when professional fisheries – even small ones – continue in neighbouring jurisdictions. We hope that France can move in the coming years toward phasing this fishery out entirely.*

*With respect to the recreational fishery, we note that after the establishment of various voluntary measures to manage this fishery over the last few years and a reduction in catch in 2022, recreational catch again increased in 2023. In regard to the recreational fishery we encourage you to conduct the transition from a net fishery to other gears types as is consistent with angling regulations in adjacent countries.’*

- 6.5 The United States encouraged France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon) to continue to reduce its catch to the lowest possible level, while continuing to provide detailed reports on the outcomes and management of the fishery, to allow ICES to better characterise the impact of the fishery on contributing stocks. The United States also encouraged France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon) to continue to enhance its sampling programme, as appropriate, in particular to reach the 10 % sampling threshold to increase the probability of detecting the occurrence of non-local stocks. Further, the United States urged France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon), to consider joining NASCO and be open to any new ideas or approaches from others that could enhance the co-operation and engagement of France (in respect of St Pierre and Miquelon) with NASCO.

## **7. Salmonid Introductions and Transfers**

- 7.1 The Chair stated that under Article 7 of the Convention, the Williamsburg Resolution, and the NAC protocols, members of the Commission must report on salmonid introductions and transfers. She reminded the Commission that in 2010 it had decided that 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](#)).
- 7.2 The Chair informed the Commission that prior to the Annual Meeting, Canada and the United States had shared reports and held an informal bilateral meeting. This enabled the reports to be reviewed and questions to be asked and responded to. She thanked Canada, [NAC\(24\)04rev2](#), and the United States, [NAC\(24\)05](#), for their annual reports.
- 7.3 In advance of the Annual Meeting, Canada submitted the following questions to the

United States:

*Q1 'Is there any monitoring / detection of aquaculture escapes in rivers in the US? If so, could this be reflected in the NAC report as well (as Canada is currently doing)?'*

**Response from the United States:** *'On the Kennebec, Penobscot, Union and Narraguagus Rivers fish traps are in place where we are able to intercept aquaculture origin fish. On the Sheepscot, Pleasant, Machias and East Machias rivers where we do not have trapping facilities, Atlantic salmon parr are collected annually and raised to maturity in support of the conservation hatchery program. All mature adults undergo genetic screening before they are spawned to ensure that fish with non-north American or aquaculture origin alleles are culled from the population.'*

*Q2 'Are there any potential flood risks in the inland ponds and lakes where the majority of fish are stocked in the Commission area?'*

**Response from the United States:** *'While flood risks do exist, it is important to point out that within Atlantic salmon watersheds there is no stocking of brown and rainbow trout.'*

*A stocking permit is required for the stocking of all species. While there is no broad ban or prohibition in law or rule on stocking nonnative salmonids (brown and rainbow trout), stocking policies for public and private waters significantly restrict the stocking of nonnative salmonids. Neither species are permitted for stocking in areas where there is a concern of feral populations establishing and negatively impacting existing native fisheries. As an added measure of protection, Maine has just implemented a triploid program for our production of rainbows that will effectively eliminate reproductive success in waters where stocking is allowed.'*

*Q3 'What is the genetic strain of the eggs from Riverence, WA? Are they diploid or triploid? Is the purpose for land-based or marine net-pen aquaculture production?'*

**Response from the United States:** *'The Atlantic salmon eggs that came from Riverence, WA were diploids of North American origin initially acquired from the Gaspé Bay, Saint John River in Quebec. The fish will be grown out in marine bases net-pens.'*

7.4 In advance of the Annual Meeting, the United States submitted the following questions to Canada:

*Q1 'In Section 3 – Summary of Salmonid introductions from outside the Commission Area – the disposition states that all these fish are in land-based facilities.'*

- a. Is land-based facilities just their initial disposition or do they remain in land-based facilities from egg to harvest?*
- b. We also noted that over 10 million European triploid salmon were being brought in. Are all these being grown out to maturity in land-based facilities?'*

**Response from Canada: 1.a.** *'For salmonid introductions from outside the Commission Area for aquaculture purposes, grow out of these fish could take place*

*in marine sites or in land-based facilities. For instance, there were all-female triploid Atlantic Salmon eggs from Iceland transferred to a land-based facility in Charlotte County, New Brunswick. They will be transferred to marine cages in Nova Scotia. Other Atlantic Salmon transfers to Nova Scotia from Iceland were raised in land-based facilities to harvest. Only sterile fish that originate from outside the Commission Area would be approved by federal-provincial Introductions and Transfers Committees for grow out in net pens.*

**Response from Canada 1.b.** *‘The over 10 million European all-female triploid Atlantic Salmon eggs from Iceland were transferred to land-based hatcheries in Daniel’s Harbour and Marystown, where they produce triploid smolt that will be transferred to marine cages in Placentia Bay, Newfoundland and Labrador.*

*Before any triploid fish are transferred to marine cages in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, or Newfoundland and Labrador, they must be sampled by a third party for an additional step of triploidy verification prior to approval for transfer.’*

**Q2** *‘The Addendum noted 65 documented escapees in the Magaguadavic River (Table 1). Based on the U.S. experience with escape events, this appears to be a fairly high number of aquaculture origin fish entering the river relative to the number of escapes being reported.*

- a. Does Canada have any insights as to why this might be?*
- b. Is there any way to track the escapes back to the farm of origin, or relate it back to a known escape event?’*

**Response from Canada: 2.a.** *‘In August 2023, industry self-reported containment breaches to the Province of New Brunswick at two sites in Davidson’s Head (near Deer Island and Long Pond), New Brunswick, from seal predation. It is likely that those breach events contributed to a higher number of fish being found at the Magaguadavic River fish ladder in Fall 2023.*

*Additionally, in New Brunswick, only finfish escapes or failure of containment structures where losses are equal to or greater than 50 fish are posted on the public facing registry, which may explain discrepancies in the number of escapes documented relative to the number of escapes being reported.’*

**Response from Canada 2.b.** *‘The Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture has established a traceability program that allows them to accurately identify farmed fish and trace them back to the company of origin. In New Brunswick, Fisheries and Oceans Canada works closely with provincial regulators and academia on identifying origin (i.e., aquaculture, wild, or enhancement) of any potential escapes using technologies such as scale and isotope analysis.’*

**Q3** *‘In the section of the report on the numbers of escapes, in future reports, the U.S would be interested in information on the life stages of the escaped fish.’*

**Response from Canada: 3.** *‘In future reports, Canada will include information on the life stages of the escaped fish.*

*For the 2023 reported escapes:*

- In New Brunswick, the life stage of the one known escape event of approximately 100 fish was due to a valve failure during smolt transport, therefore they were smolt. The remaining 2023 escape events were all adult fish.*

- *In Nova Scotia, the escapes took place during harvesting activities, therefore these were adult fish.'*

- 7.5 The NGO Co-Chair asked Canada for information on European genes in Canadian aquaculture escapes and to provide an overview of the Canadian Science Advisory Secretariat (CSAS) meeting last year. Canada responded that the meeting outcomes were not readily available to them at the present moment but could make the information available. Canada further explained that it was working with the appropriate authorities in Canada to issue stronger protocols for reviewing applications for translocations. Further, Canada mentioned the availability of a genomic testing tool and software package that can detect European genes and that it is working with provincial authorities to make sure the issue is addressed. The NGO Co-Chair inquired about Canada's plan to look into the translocation permits and expressed their concern regarding alien genes and unapproved translocations. Canada responded that the testing for the genes is conducted by another Canadian agency and they work together closely, although they would have to follow up with more information on the testing protocols and cadence of the testing.
- 7.6 The NGO Co-Chair enquired about the importation of triploid eggs into Nova Scotia in light of the [CSAS report](#) and whether Canada could push the industry to use triploid eggs, in line with the recommendation in NASCO's recent external performance review. Canada responded that it does not have control over the industry in that area but supports efforts to increase using triploid fish in aquaculture and would encourage Provinces to adopt that practice.
- 7.7 The NGOs provided written questions to Canada. Canada will respond to these questions in writing and the responses will be annexed to this report.
- 7.8 The NGOs raised a number of additional questions of Canada. The NAC Chair asked that these questions also be submitted in writing. Canada agreed to respond in writing and this correspondence will also be annexed to this report.

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

- 8.1 NASCO operates a Tag Return Incentive Scheme. Eligible tags that are returned to the appropriate authorities in the country of capture may be included in the draws. Each year a Grand Prize of £1,500 is awarded together with three prizes of £1,000, one in each of NASCO's three Commission areas.
- 8.2 The winner of the North American Commission £1,000 prize in the NASCO Tag Return Incentive Scheme was Steve Smith, Canada.
- 8.3 The tag was placed on a wild salmon returning to the Southwest Miramichi River (New Brunswick, Canada) in 2022. The fish was captured on October 2, 2022 at the estuary trap net in Millerton 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, the sex was identified and scale samples were taken. It was marked externally with a light blue Carlin tag prior to release back to the river. It measured 77.8 cm fork length and, based on external characteristics, the fish was identified as a wild two-sea-winter female salmon. It was recaptured during the recreational fishery on April 19 2023, on the Southwest Miramichi River at a location locally known as Quarryville. It was subsequently released by the angler as there were mandatory catch and release measures in place for Atlantic salmon in 2023.



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

- 9.1 The Convention requires NASCO to take into account the best scientific evidence and establish working arrangements with ICES. The Standing Scientific Committee (SSC) assists the Council and Commissions in formulating their questions to ICES. During the Annual Meeting, the SSC meets to develop a Draft Request for Scientific Advice from ICES for consideration by the Commissions and the Council.
- 9.2 The Commission agreed the request for scientific advice from ICES prepared by the Standing Scientific Committee in relation to the North American Commission area. The request to ICES, as agreed by the Council, is contained in document CNL(24)09 (Annex 4).

## **10. Election of Officers**

- 10.1 The Commission elected Dale Marsden (Canada) as its Chair (proposed by the United States) and Patrick Keliher (USA) as its Vice-Chair (proposed by Canada), both to serve for a period of two years, to commence from the close of the 2024 Annual Meeting.

## **11. Other Business**

- 11.1 In relation to the decision by Council to end the tag return incentive scheme, the United States offered to exchange preliminary thoughts in the North American Commission meeting on the United States' proposal to repurpose a portion of the tag return incentive scheme funds towards the citizen science scheme in the West Greenland salmon fishery. The Secretary clarified that the Commissions do not have budgets and that the funds for the prize come from the Council's budget.
- 11.2 Canada offered a path forward where the Commission could provide the Council with a recommendation to consider allocating the freed-up funds to support citizen science and activities in the interest of salmon and the feasibility of such an approach. When asked by the Chair whether there was comfort with the proposed way forward, the United States agreed but expressed a desire to further confer with Canada.
- 11.3 The United States withdrew its proposal to repurpose the tag return incentive scheme funds. This was due to the clarification provided by the Secretary that the Commissions do not have budgets and that the funds for the prize come from the Council's budget.

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

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

## **13. Report of the Meeting**

- 13.1 The Commission agreed a Report of the Meeting.

## **14. Close of the Meeting**

- 14.1 The Chair thanked the participants for their contributions and closed the Meeting.