

Council

CNL(04)48

*Council Agenda item 9. The Future of NASCO
NGO comments on proposal from the Parties*

***Council Agenda item 9. The Future of NASCO
NGO comments on proposal from the Parties***

Mr President, speaking in one special session during a Council meeting is unusual, to have the opportunity to speak in two is very novel, and we thank you personally for that.

You asked me to be brief, but I want to start by telling you a true story. On Wednesday, the NASCO NGOs were invited to lunch here in Reykjavik by Orri Vigfusson, Chairman of the North Atlantic Salmon Fund. After a very good lunch, Orri stood up and told us that NASCO was finished, that we needed a new order to save salmon, of course, his order. It was a difficult situation, we were in Iceland, and all the major Icelandic salmon fishery owners were present, and it was a nice lunch. So I stood up on behalf of the NGOs and thanked him for the lunch, but then I told him, very politely, that his ideas were codswallop. NASCO was the only inter-governmental agency with a remit to conserve salmon, and as such it deserved our support and that we would continue to pressure it to make more and faster progress. We would, of course, also support his fund-raising efforts, where appropriate. I said that this year we thought we were seeing a sea-change in the attitude of the Parties towards the future of NASCO and particularly to the prospect of developing a closer working partnership with NGOs. This brings me to the current proposal from the Parties.

First of all, the NGOs wish to congratulate NASCO on their courage in adopting this agenda item and the idea of convening a round-table forum or special session to which all interested parties could contribute. We like to think that, as well as the Secretary's report and the US paper CNL 04 35, that the authored Vision statement had a constructive input to that decision.

However, the proposal from the Parties does seem to focus, like the US paper, on NASCO structures and processes. We think it's important not to lose sight of NASCO's fundamental objective, which is to conserve wild Atlantic salmon. In that sense, the Vision statement highlights areas where the ability of NASCO to take actions in that direction might be strengthened. Of course, any organisation needs an

efficient structure and processes, but these must remain subordinate to the main objective.

We were also extremely disappointed that the draft terms of reference omit to mention the words “NASCO NGO” anywhere in its text, instead we have the ubiquitous term, “stakeholder”. There are various definitions of “stakeholder”, but the one I like best is someone capable of slaying vampires. This facetious example illustrates the point that without some form of qualification, you could be inviting evidence from some very strange bedfellows. Why is it not possible to insert the term “accredited NGOs or observers and relevant stakeholders”?

Your NGOs have consistently promoted the idea of working in partnership with NASCO, and NASCO has responded by inviting an NGO observer to the International Salmon Research Board and an NGO representative to the Scientific Advisory Group. Recently I have been invited to join the steering group for the 2005 symposium on Impacts of Aquaculture in Bergen. This is presumably because NASCO values the contributions brought to the table.

However, it is clear that some Parties harbour serious reservations about going further at this stage, so I need to make it clear what our ambitions are. We are not, indeed we cannot, aim for equal status – NASCO is an inter-governmental organisation and we are its observers, the roles are clearly defined. However, we are aiming to make an equal contribution, but to achieve that, we have to be able to participate.

We note that the Council minute “encourages the Working Group to involve a representative of the NGOs in their planning process”. We welcome the suggestion but are very disappointed that the phrase is not incorporated into the terms of reference. Mr President, this is an opportunity for Council to continue to develop their relationship with their NGOs, and we urge you to seize it. Can I re-emphasise that NGOs represent a wide spectrum of expertise including, salmon management, research, conservation and recreational angling; and we are a major link to the wider public. We believe a firm Council decision would send out the right signals both to the NGO and wider salmon community (including Mr Vigfusson) about NASCO’s intentions for the future.