

NGO Questions at the Special Session on Homewater Fisheries

First of all, Mr President, may I thank the EU for their presentation, and NASCO for facilitating this as a special session.

We have one quite complicated question and a couple of shorter ones. The complicated one is directed at the Irish, and we have already supplied this in writing, so that we can receive a considered response.

First of all, we are disappointed that the Irish presentation began by selectively quoting last year's ICES advice. We would have hoped that, in a specialist Forum like this, the presentation could have been based on current advice, which is unequivocal; that exploitation of Southern European 1 SW and MSW fish should be confined to rivers/stocks which are shown to be above conservation limits.

It was good to hear from the Irish presentation that the national stock was above its CL, and that the drift net fishery exploits relatively small numbers of fish destined for other countries. Data from the UK's Environment Agency shows that the Irish drift nets take 5-10% of salmon from chalkstreams in Southern England which, in the context of rivers with very low stocks and virtually no in-river exploitation, is particularly significant. These rivers are also designated as SACs, so the Irish may be in breach of European Directives. The information on stock recovery presented by ICES emphasises the need to end this type of exploitation by the Irish nets asap. I could also extend this argument to the recovering rivers of France, Germany and Spain, whose fish are also intercepted by the Irish nets. Significant sums of money are being expended in all these countries on in-river restoration programmes, which are being partially negated by the Irish drift nets.

This comment relates to ICES management advice concerning mixed stock fisheries. Another dimension is the socio-economic value:

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The Indecon Report of 2003 valued an Irish rod caught salmon at something over 22 times that of a netted fish, proving the overwhelming socio-economic advantages of angling over commercial fishing. At the time, Minister Browne promised in his press release that, *to do nothing is not an option.*

In England, the Government recently put £1.25m into the buy-out of the majority of NE coast drift net licenses, a fishery exploiting 36,000 salmon a year. This showed admirable governmental responsibility, not only towards exploitation of local fish stocks, but also those destined for rivers in a neighbouring country. It also proved the worth of partnerships between governments and private interests.

We heard on Tuesday that the Irish were heading towards a TAC in line with scientific advice, yet this will still maintain a drift net fishery exploiting 135,000 salmon a year, together with a significant number of unrecorded fish stolen from nets by predators.

Taking into account ICES management advice to end mixed stocked fisheries, and the need to protect marginal stocks, together with the recent success of the NE England buy-

out, how soon do you consider the Irish Government could move towards a partnership with private fishery interests to bring about a voluntary cessation of drift net fishing off the Southern Irish coast, with compensation paid to licensees?