



**Council**

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***The NGO perspective on the International Year of the Salmon  
(Stephen G. Sutton, Atlantic Salmon Federation, Canada)***



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**Introduction**

An International Year of the Salmon with the theme *Salmon and People in a Changing World* has been proposed for 2019. At its Thirty-Third (2016) Annual Meeting, NASCO recognised that an International Year of the Salmon (IYS) could provide a good opportunity to raise awareness of the factors driving salmon abundance, the challenges they face and the measures being taken to address them. Consequently, NASCO agreed to co-lead the planning of the event (along with NPAFC). At its Thirty Fourth Annual Meeting, NASCO held a half-day special session focused on the planning of IYS activities. In recognition of the fact that the success of the IYS will depend on partnerships and extra-governmental involvement, NASCO's accredited NGO's were invited to participate in that special session and provide their perspective on their potential contribution to IYS activities and outcomes. This document outlines the NGO's perspective on the IYS as presented in the special session.

**NGO understanding of the goals of IYS**

The NGOs understand that three key goals of IYS have emerged from the early discussions and planning sessions: 1) Raise awareness of what the public can do to help ensure salmon and their ecosystems are protected and recovered; 2) Increase collaboration among researchers undertaking efforts to understand the factors affecting salmon under a changing climate to effectively support the management of salmon and allow the important social and economic benefits that salmon provide to be realised now and into the future; and 3) Stimulate an investment in research which will leave a legacy of knowledge, data/information systems, tools and a new generation of scientists equipped to provide timely advice that will inform the conservation, recovery and rational management of salmon.

The NGOs also understand that specific IYS activities related to Atlantic salmon to be undertaken by NASCO and partners have yet to be decided, but that discussions have revolved around the idea that Atlantic salmon related activities will focus heavily on outreach and education to raise public awareness and motivate action in support of Atlantic salmon conservation. Consequently, the NGO perspective presented at the special session and outlined in this document focuses largely on outreach and education activities for motivating conservation action.

**NASCO NGOs: Who are we and what do we want from IYS?**

NASCO currently has 38 accredited Non Governmental Organizations spread across Europe (n=30) and North America (n=8). NASCO NGOs are diverse with organizations generally falling into one of five broad categories: 1) Salmon conservation focused (n=14); 2) Fishing related (n=13); 3) General conservation (n=5); 4) Education (n=5); and Indigenous Peoples (n=2). Collectively, the NGOs bring a wide range of skills and experience to bear on salmon conservation issues (e.g., science, fisheries management, business management, education, local and indigenous knowledge, leadership, law, politics, academics, etc.) and undertake a wide range of activities in support of salmon conservation (e.g., research, advocacy, education,

watershed restoration, community engagement, communications, fund raising, research funding and management, relationship building, etc.).

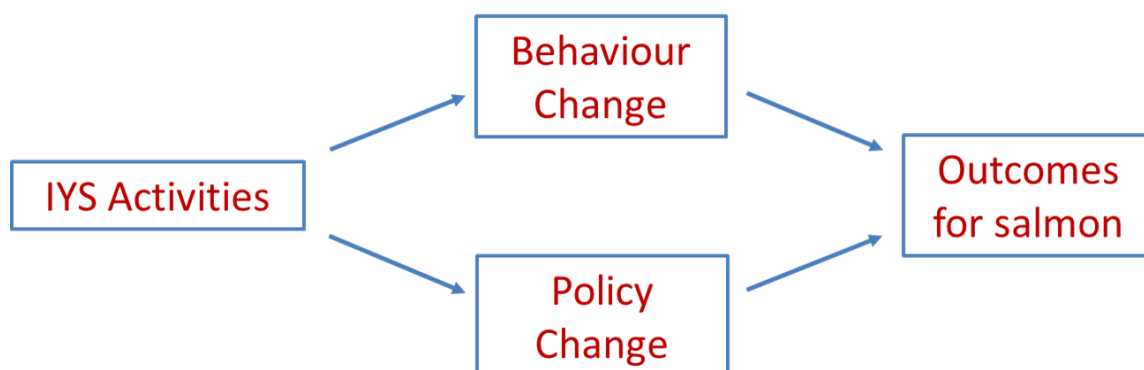
Indeed, it is likely that, collectively, NASCO NGOs are already doing most, if not all, of the types of activities that will comprise the IYS. Furthermore, most NGOs work with limited resources and tight budgets and therefore have limited scope for taking on new activities. Consequently, motivating NGO engagement in IYS will best be achieved by building on our strengths and finding ways to improve/enhance/expand the things we are already doing to achieve outcomes for Atlantic salmon. Questions to consider include: how can IYS help NGOs coordinate our activities? Develop new relationship? Enhance our capacity for action? Attract new resources? Develop new messaging and educational materials? Reach new audiences? Motivate people and governments to act?

A key component of motivating NGOs will be developing IYS activities that have clear and planned outcomes for Atlantic salmon that are meaningful, achievable, and measurable. The NGOs feel very strongly that IYS activities must aim to do more than simply raise the profile of NASCO and/or governments or highlight and promote existing activities, and we feel there is a risk that without careful planning, vital resources of both governments and NGOs could be inadvertently diverted into “feel good” activities that do little to advance the conservation of wild Atlantic salmon.

### **From goals and activities to outcomes for salmon**

We recognize that planning for salmon outcomes is not easy, and that IYS may be limited by its very nature in the outcomes it is likely to achieve. Likewise, some outcomes may be realized long after IYS has concluded, and there may be unintended or unanticipated outcomes that may not be incorporated in the planning process. Despite these challenges, we feel that further planning for IYS and selection of outreach and education activities under the IYS banner should occur in an outcomes-based context.

Figure 1 describes a basic framework for linking IYS activities to outcomes. Use of the framework involves first understanding and articulating desired outcomes for salmon, and then working backwards to understand and articulate the changes in human behaviour and/or public policy that are necessary to achieve those outcomes. From that information, activities can be chosen that have the highest likelihood of leading to behaviour or policy change. For example, a key outcome for salmon might be to reduce recreational fishing mortality. That outcome



**Figure 1.** An outcomes-based framework for linking IYS activities to outcomes for salmon.

could be achieved by persuading recreational anglers to voluntarily practice live release fishing (behaviour change) and/or convincing management agencies to reduce angling harvest limits

(policy change). This information could be then used to design appropriate advocacy and outreach activities and messages to engage with recreational anglers and fisheries managers in areas where there is scope to reduce angling mortality. We urge the IYS planning committee to use such a planning framework to avoid the common trap of developing activities that are “interesting” or “fun” but which have no clearly articulated pathways to successful outcomes.

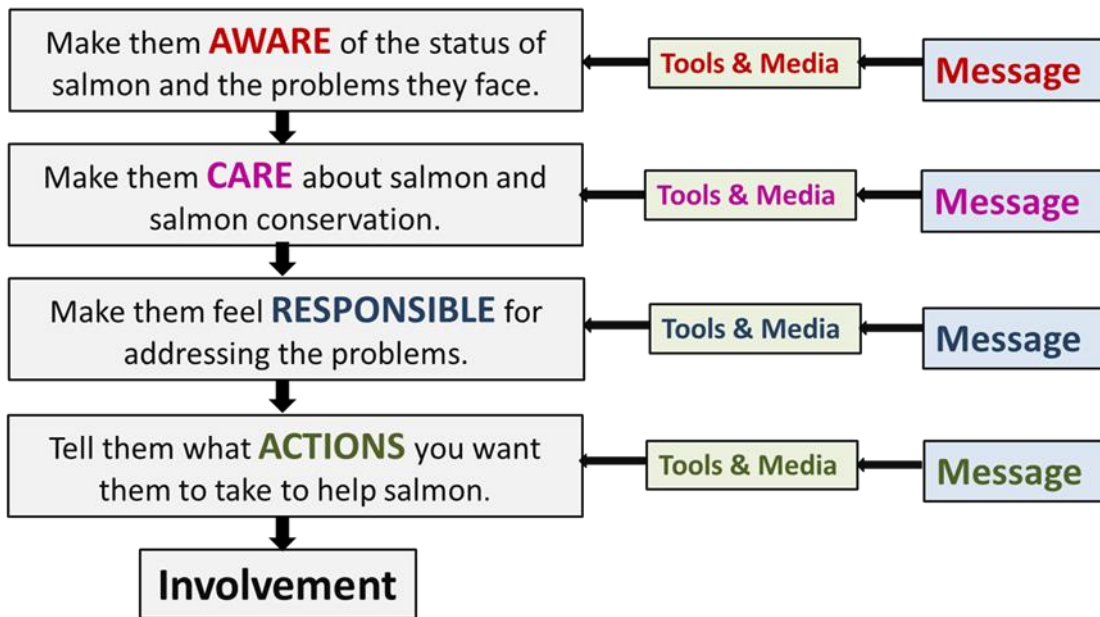
### **Achieving outcomes for salmon through outreach and education**

Achieving appropriate behaviour and policy changes through outreach and education requires a clearly articulated theory of change i.e., a well thought out plan that considers the pathways and variables through which change is expected to occur. A theory of change answers the question: what are the things (e.g., knowledge, attitudes, motivation, etc.) that your outreach and communications efforts need to influence in order to achieve the desired behaviour or policy changes? A well developed theory of change allows communicators to develop appropriate messages and choose appropriate communication tools and media to effectively target communications. Typically, a theory of change is based on a combination of objective evidence, social science theory, experience, and subjective opinion (Frumkin 2002; Coffman 2003). Social science theories that frequently form the basis of outreach and communication for behaviour change in an environmental context include the Values-Beliefs-Norms Theory (Stern 2000) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen 1985).

Figure 2 outlines a basic theory of change to achieve relevant behaviour change through IYS outreach and education activities. The model is based loosely on the widely used Values-Beliefs-Norms (VBN) theory (Stern 2000) which suggests that an individual’s desire/motivation to engage in pro-environmental behaviour is a function of the person being aware of threats to something they value and care about (i.e., salmon) and feeling responsible for taking action to answer those threats. The VBN theory suggests that communication messages that are consistent with individuals’ values around salmon, inform them about the threats to salmon, persuade them that they have the responsibility and ability to take action to answer those threats, and inform them of what actions they can take to answer those threats are more likely to result in behaviour change (and therefore outcomes for salmon) than messages that do not target these variables.

There are a number of important implications of using such a change theory to guide outreach activities. First is that messages must target all variables included in the theory (or at least all variables where attention is necessary). For example, messages that aim to simply make people aware what they can do to help salmon are not likely to be effective if members of the target audience do not care about salmon and/or do not believe it is their responsibility to take action to help. Likewise, convincing people to care and feel responsible for salmon will not necessarily lead to action if people are not knowledgeable about what actions they can do to address the issues. Second, messages aimed at different variables in the model will likely need to be different. That is, messages aimed at informing people about threats to salmon will likely be different from messages aimed at persuading people that they have a responsibility to take action. It may often be possible to include multiple messages in single communication interventions and outreach activities, but doing so may not always be possible or advisable.

## How can we use outreach and education to encourage people to become involved in salmon conservation?



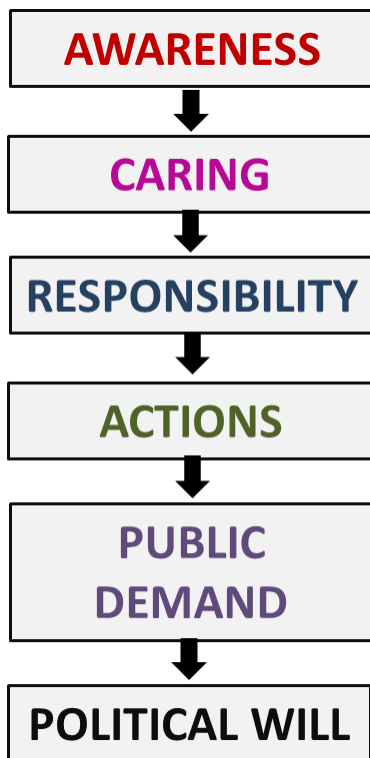
**Figure 2.** A basic theory to achieve individual behaviour change through IYS outreach and education.

And third, education and outreach activities are likely to be most effective when they are based on knowledge of the target audience. Relevant and up-to-date information on the target audience can be valuable for knowing where to target messages (i.e., at awareness, caring, responsibility, etc.) and for developing messages that are likely to be effective.

Figure 3 outlines a basic theory aimed at achieving policy change through outreach and education. The policy change theory is similar to the behaviour change theory describe above in that includes similar components (awareness, caring, responsibility, actions). It differs, however, in that the actions members of the public are asked to take revolve around creating and demonstrating public demand for policy change which, in turn, should create the political will to motivate public officials to take policy action. It should be noted that outreach and education activities are usually only one component of an advocacy campaign directed at achieving policy change; to be effective, such campaigns should also include advocacy efforts specifically directed at public officials (such efforts may occur in the media, but they may also occur out of the public eye) (Salmon et al. 2003). The extent to which advocacy efforts directed at public officials might occur under the IYS banner is not yet clear. If such efforts are deemed inappropriate for IYS, outreach and education efforts aimed at policy change may still be valuable if they support ongoing advocacy activities undertaken by NGOs.

### How do we find the right messages for our outreach and education activities?

Achieving positive outcomes for salmon through IYS outreach and education will be heavily dependent upon developing the right messages to be delivered to the target audiences. As noted above, messages will vary depending not only on the target audience, but also on whether messages need to raise awareness of issues facing salmon, connect people to salmon in a way that arouses care and concern, persuade people that addressing issues is their responsibility, or



**Figure 3.** A basic theory to achieve policy change through IYS. Achieving policy change requires individual actions aimed at creating public demand and political will for policy change.

motivate people to take specific actions (or some combination of all of these). Within that completed context, it is often difficult for communicators to know at which level(s) of the change theory to direct messages and what messages are likely to be effective. Unfortunately, messages are often chosen based on guesswork, which often significantly reduces the effectiveness of outreach and education campaigns.

The key to developing appropriate and effective messages is to understand the target audience through research. Such research is typically conducted through surveys, interviews, focus groups, etc. to understand peoples’ existing knowledge about salmon, the extent to which they feel connected to and care about salmon (or not), ways in which they feel responsible (or not) for addressing salmon-related issues, and motivations and constraints surrounding specific actions that people can take to address salmon issues. Likewise, additional research can also be used to test and refine messages and communication tools that are developed based on the information collected by the first phase of research, and for evaluating the extent to which desired outcomes are achieved.

It is acknowledged that the types of research needed to appropriately inform and test outreach and education messages and methods takes time, that IYS is of limited duration, and that some IYS outreach and education activities will likely begin before appropriate research can be conducted. However, the need for effective outreach and

education for behaviour and policy change will not end with IYS, and NGOs will continue these types of efforts long after IYS has concluded. We note that Objective 3 of IYS is to “stimulate an investment in research which will leave a legacy of knowledge... that will inform the conservation, recovery and rational management of salmon.” It is the recommendation of NGOs that such research include a strong human dimensions component aimed at leaving a legacy of appropriate high quality information that can be used in support of future outreach and education efforts aimed at achieving behaviour and policy changes in support of salmon conservation.

**Summary**

NASCO’s accredited NGOs feel strongly that IYS activities must be directed at achieving positive outcomes for Atlantic salmon by aiming for relevant, meaningful, and achievable changes in human behaviour and government policy. Consequently, IYS outreach and education activities must be chosen on the basis of their potential to result in positive outcomes for salmon, and activities must be carefully planned to achieve those outcomes. Raising public awareness about salmon and the issues they face is an important part of the process, but it is not the end goal. Outreach and education activities must also connect people to salmon and salmon conservation in a way that promotes caring, concern, and feelings of responsibility leading to desired actions and changes at the individual and government levels. Activities that are chosen solely on the basis that they are fun or easy to plan are not likely to have the desired

impacts and may be counterproductive if they divert attention or resources away from addressing the most pressing issues for salmon. Outreach and education activities are more likely to be successful if they are chosen and planned on the basis of research to understand the knowledge, thoughts, feelings, and motivations of the target audience. As such, a strong program of human dimensions research aimed at supporting and focusing outreach and education activities would make a valuable contribution to the planned legacy of knowledge from IYS. NASCO's accredited NGOs are prepared to engage in IYS activities, and our engagement will be further motivated and facilitated through the development of activities that aim for positive outcomes for salmon and that build on our collective strengths and the activities that we are already engaged in.

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