



Council

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Impact of the West Greenland Fishery on North American Stocks

NGO Statement

Atlantic Salmon Federation and the World Wildlife Fund

Statement to the Council made by the Atlantic Salmon Federation and the World Wildlife Fund

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By Bill Taylor, President, Atlantic Salmon Federation

I am pleased to address NASCO as a representative of the North American non government organizations (NGOs) that include the Atlantic Salmon Federation and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). Tom Grasso, Director of the WWF Marine Conservation Program, is representing WWF.

ASF, as a founding member of NASCO, and WWF, a long-standing accredited NGO to NASCO, have carefully followed NASCO's progress. We and our European NGO colleagues believe strongly in NASCO's mission to promote consultation and cooperation in the conservation, restoration, enhancement and rational management of salmon stocks through international cooperation. We wish to pursue these goals in a cooperative spirit with the nations represented at NASCO.

International Atlantic Salmon Accord

In 1998, NGOs presented an International Atlantic Salmon Accord to NASCO that outlined the need for corrective action on seven critical issues that impede the successful restoration of wild Atlantic salmon populations. Last year, many of our partners issued a report card that scored governments on their performance in addressing these issues. Our purpose is to encourage better performance in achieving our collective goals. A report card on Canada's progress was recently completed by ASF and our Canadian Regional Councils and their 120 river conservation organizations. We informed the Canadian Government of the report card results and made them public in May.

Mixed-population Fisheries

Since its inception, NASCO has worked to curtail the detrimental impacts of salmon fishing on the high seas. Because wild Atlantic salmon populations in North America are below safe biological limits, the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) strongly advises that there be no commercial salmon fishery at Greenland this year. The majority of wild Atlantic salmon populations that migrate to West Greenland are of North American origin, some of them from endangered populations. We commend the leadership of the U.S. and Canadian governments in terminating commercial fisheries for wild Atlantic salmon in their territorial waters. It is in our collective interest to emulate the North American actions at Greenland through a long-term conservation agreement with Greenland fishermen that provides them fair compensation funded by government. We do not propose to end the local consumption, subsistence fishery so important to the social and cultural fabric of Greenlanders.

Precautionary Approach

In 1998, NASCO and its Contracting Parties resolved *"to adopt and apply a Precautionary Approach to the conservation, management and exploitation of salmon in order to protect the resource and preserve the environments in which it lives. Accordingly, NASCO and its Contracting Parties should be more cautious when information is uncertain, unreliable or inadequate. The absence of adequate scientific information should not be used as a reason for postponing or failing to take conservation and management measures."*

We commend this approach but, unfortunately, four years later, NASCO is still struggling with how to apply the Precautionary Approach and, as a result, decisions that are detrimental to salmon conservation are being made.

We urge quick adoption of a decision structure that applies the Precautionary Approach to management and urge full adherence to the intent of the approach in decisions on the introductions and transfers of aquatic organisms. Governments must prohibit the introduction of transgenic salmon, foreign and non-native strains of salmon to the marine and freshwater environment.

Above all, economic and social factors should not override strong protection of the remaining populations of wild Atlantic salmon. The salmon farming industry is insisting that the industry's economic benefits prevail over environmental concerns. Economic development, if not regulated by a code of conduct that requires environmentally-sustainable practices, is a transient benefit. Damage to the environment, on the other hand, especially genetic introgression, is permanent. NASCO should keep this in mind and be cautious when addressing the issue of aquaculture and its negative impacts on wild Atlantic salmon.

NASCO-Salmon Farming Liaison Group

We repeat our call to NASCO for inclusion of NGOs as observers to the NASCO-Salmon Farming Liaison Group. NASCO must show leadership in promoting cooperation between the aquaculture industry and conservation organizations. ASF has endeavored in recent years to foster cooperative endeavors with members of the North American salmon farming industry to find solutions to the issues of escape and fish health. With some exceptions, there has been no significant cooperation forthcoming from the salmon farming industry.

International Cooperative Salmon Research Board

We are supportive of the International Cooperative Salmon Research Board formed by NASCO in 2001. Partnerships with NGOs are vital in this undertaking. For example, it is very important to coordinate with ASF on marine tracking as we have helped develop the technology and have actually tracked salmon at sea in a cooperative program with the U.S. and Canadian governments and other private sector players over a span of eight years. In addition, it is very important to prevent competition with NGOs in fundraising for the scarce resources available to support research.

Community Watershed Management

ICES recommends the management of wild Atlantic salmon on a watershed basis. The National Academy of Science in the U.S. and genetic assessments in Canada have determined

that each river population is genetically unique. Each river requires its own conservation, assessment and restoration program. There is a need for financial and moral support from governments in implementing river-specific community watershed management. This will aid river stewards who contribute so much to the conservation of wild Atlantic salmon and sustain well-managed recreational fisheries of significant economic value.

In closing, I urge NASCO's Contracting Parties to view NGOs as conservation partners and to work closely with us in achieving timely progress in addressing the critical issues that affect the survival of our wild Atlantic salmon.

