



Agenda item 4.3
For decision

Council

CNL(02)8

NASCO Communications



NASCO Communications

1. Introduction

- 1.1 At the Council's Eighteenth Annual Meeting the Secretary was asked to review the procedures of other inter-governmental organizations with regard to communications and participation in their meetings. I have interpreted communications to mean, "How does NASCO communicate with the rest of the world?", essentially how NASCO communicates with the media and the public. Before going further I should clarify that I do not classify NASCO's NGO and IGO observers as "the rest of the world". These bodies are, in effect, a part of NASCO and, as such, this review also considers how these bodies report the work of NASCO to the media and to the public.

2. Present Arrangements

- 2.1 At present the public are allowed to attend only the Opening Session of the Council. Under the present rules the media can attend all meetings and there are no restrictions on what they publish. They may not make statements and cameras and/or recording equipment are only permitted at the Opening Session, or at other sessions with the agreement of the Council or relevant Commission. A press conference may be held at the close of the Annual Meeting. It is unusual, although it has happened, for media representatives to attend the whole of the Annual Meeting. They are usually interested, beforehand, in knowing about the issues coming up at the Annual Meeting, and afterwards, about the outcome. For the former they will normally contact the Secretariat. I have, in the past, answered any questions about the upcoming issues and put them in touch with the Parties when their questions related to a national rather than an international issue. After the meeting, the President and Secretary usually make themselves available to the media. This system has worked reasonably well so far as I am aware. There is also a Press Release, agreed by the Council, which is issued at the end of the meeting. This is used by national delegations as they see fit. The Secretariat issues it on demand.
- 2.2 NGO observers receive all Council and Commission papers and may also attend all sessions of the Council and Commissions. They can make opening statements at meetings of the Council (which are annexed to the report) and Commissions, contribute to Special Sessions and issue written statements. So our NGO colleagues and the Official Delegations have many opportunities to communicate. Some NGOs have their own publications and they may wish to publish articles or issue press releases giving their reaction to issues being considered at the Annual Meeting. In recent years the NGOs have organised press conferences prior to, during and after the Annual Meetings, and there has been considerable media coverage as a result.
- 2.3 IGOs may also attend meetings of the Council and Commissions and may be invited to make statements. They receive all papers.

3. Review of these Arrangements

- 3.1 One thing that is clear to me as Secretary is that the NASCO Secretariat has very limited resources to enable it to operate a Public Relations activity of any depth or sophistication. Indeed, some of our larger NGOs, such as WWF, Greenpeace and ASF have advanced PR and media operations with specialised staff and resources that far outweigh NASCO's. In effect, we have no special skills or resources in this area. We do publish a biennial report on the activities of the Organization which is widely circulated and appears to be well received. The publication of this report and the press release issued at the end of the Annual Meeting might be seen as the Organization's main public relations activities. In addition, the Tag Return Incentive Scheme has brought benefits at little cost, through increased awareness of the work of NASCO as a result of the publicity surrounding the award of prizes.
- 3.2 This raises the question of whether the Council should do more to communicate its work and its message to the outside world. The harsh fact is that if we do not do it, we leave it to others who will inevitably put their own gloss on the issues.
- 3.3 Media relations can be divided into three periods of the year:

3.3.1 *Media relations throughout the year*

Normally queries come to the Secretary and if I feel I can deal with them on the basis of established NASCO policy then I do so. If not, I make it clear that it is my personal opinion. If it is a national issue, I refer it to the appropriate Delegation. The same can be said for the President, but normally media approaches come to the Secretary in Edinburgh.

3.3.2 *Media relations during the Annual Meeting*

So far as I am aware, Official Delegations do not comment to the media during the course of the meetings about the progress of the negotiations. They may explain the issues. In the past, this practice has been followed by our NGO observers. There was an instance at the Eighteenth Annual Meeting, however, of an NGO issuing a Press Release during the negotiations, which were at a sensitive stage. This caused some concern, in that it involved what might, perhaps, be seen as privileged information and the action could have adversely affected the outcome of the negotiations. It is clear that negotiations may involve discussion of a number of hypothetical proposals and it can be unhelpful for these to be transmitted to the media. The Council will need to consider whether there should be some amendment to the conditions governing NGO observer status to deal with this matter.

3.3.3 *Close of Annual Meeting*

The Press Release issued by the Council at the conclusion of the meeting also needs to be considered. With the best will in the world, the Secretary and Assistant Secretary are not journalists. We are not skilled in creating and editing text that will appeal to the media; experts would do it better. The Press Release can be seen as "boring" if written in the, somewhat dry, terms used in

inter-governmental reports. However, it can be seen as inaccurate, or undignified, if it attempts to catch the eye. In the early years of NASCO we did employ a media consultant to arrange media coverage of the meetings and the President and Secretary would meet with the media immediately after the Opening Session. This led to some delays in re-starting the meeting. So in recent years the President and Secretary have made themselves available to the media at the close of the meeting when the outcome of the issues on the agenda is known. We have not employed a PR consultant in recent years, although when we have met away from Edinburgh the host government's press officer has sometimes arranged contact with the media. One possibility would be to employ a firm of PR consultants to deal with the media and to assist with drafting our Press Release but this could cost in the region of £5,000-£10,000 per annum. The other solution would be to use what PR skills exist in the Delegations and to appoint a small Media Committee to draft the Press Release. The problem there is that a Committee draft would probably not be any more appealing and may well lead to delays at the end of the meeting. So, while the present method (i.e. drafted by the Secretariat and agreed following any necessary amendments by the Council) is not ideal, and is no match for modern PR methods, it functions reasonably well although the output will probably always be less attractive to editors than material concerning the meetings developed by some of our NGOs with PR skills.

4. Procedures within Other International Organizations

- 4.1 We have approached IBSFC, ICCAT, IWC, NAFO, NAMMCO, NEAFC and NPAFC asking for details of their procedures on participation by NGOs at their meetings and, in particular, those concerning communications. A summary of the responses received is given in Annex 1.
- 4.2 All international organizations need to consider Public Relations. The world of salmon is of wide interest; the number of NGOs accredited to NASCO gives an indication of that. NASCO has recognised that attendance by NGOs at its meetings has been of mutual benefit and we have moved faster than most to increase participation in our meetings. The inter-governmental Commissions we approached, apart from NPAFC, have developed conditions governing attendance by NGOs at their meetings. Failure to adhere to these conditions can result in the withdrawal of accreditation and the same sanction is possible under NASCO's conditions for NGO observers.
- 4.3 As far as we are aware there have only been two problems with NGO participation in NASCO which have been raised in the Council over the last fifteen years or so. These arose because of the issue of multiple e-mails to representatives by one NGO prior to the Seventeenth Annual Meeting, and because of the issue of a press release at a sensitive stage during negotiations at the Eighteenth Annual Meeting. Both of these actions caused concern to one or more Parties. While the Council of NASCO can suspend an NGO's observer status in the event of non-adherence to the conditions, as presently formulated, these deal mainly with the conditions to be satisfied for accreditation as an NGO, rather than conduct at meetings. The Council might, therefore, wish to develop new conditions governing NGO status to specifically address the concerns that have arisen. In particular, it would be possible to include a

condition stating that during the Annual Meetings NGOs may not issue press releases or other information to the media on agenda items under discussion at the meeting. Further, the NGOs themselves have recognised that the activities of two of the accredited organizations have caused problems, and we understand that they are developing their own guidelines on conduct at NASCO's meetings, which might address the Council's concerns. The intention is that these will be tabled at the meeting and if they are seen as adequate the Council might wish to endorse these proposals for self-regulation.

- 4.4 The Council might also wish to consider restricting media attendance to the Opening Session of the Council only, as is the practice in some other international Commissions, since, with the present arrangement, a media representative could legitimately publish an article which might have an influence on the outcome of the meeting. Furthermore, an NGO might legitimately claim to be a media representative reporting for his or her Organization's journal.
- 4.5 Some NGOs have not attended NASCO's annual meetings for many years or otherwise communicated with the Organization. There would be some cost savings if we did not have to communicate with these organizations and indeed the contact details we have for some of these organizations are now out of date. Some other Commissions require that NGOs apply annually for observer status but this requirement would create an additional workload. The Council might, therefore, wish to consider developing an additional condition under which any NGO which has not attended at least one Annual Meeting of NASCO in the previous three years will cease to be an accredited NGO but may reapply in writing to the Secretary. The impact of this would be to immediately reduce the number of NGOs by about a quarter. This might also help the NGOs' self-regulatory agreement.

5. **Conclusion**

5.1 The main issues which the Council might wish to consider are:

- (a) Should NASCO take steps to further develop and improve its PR abilities and, if so, what actions should be taken?
- (b) Should the Council adopt new conditions on NGO observers to deal with communications and non-attendance at meetings? The conditions might be worded as follows:
 - "any NGO with observer status to NASCO that has not attended at least one Annual Meeting of NASCO in the previous three years shall cease to be an accredited NGO to NASCO but may reapply in writing to the Secretary"
 - "during NASCO's Annual Meetings accredited NGOs may not issue press releases or other information to the media on agenda items under discussion at the meeting, until after the Council has agreed its own Press Release".

- (c) Should the Council endorse the guidelines for self-regulation being developed by the NGOs?
- (d) Should the Council restrict media attendance? The new condition might be worded as follows:
 - "Media representatives may only attend the Opening Session of the Council".

5.2 The Council is asked to consider these issues and decide on appropriate actions.

Secretary
Edinburgh
12 April, 2002

***Summary of Procedures for Participation by NGOs at Meetings of
Other International Organizations***

North Pacific Anadromous Fish Commission (NPAFC)

NPAFC has indicated that it does not have any specific procedures governing participation by NGOs at its meetings although the organization's Rules of Procedure state that "the Commission may from time to time determine what additional persons may be invited or permitted to attend any meeting as guests or observers." Proposals for observers are made to the Commission by its Committees on Scientific Research and Statistics (CSRS) and on Enforcement.

International Baltic Sea Fishery Commission (IBSFC)

IBSFC allows participation in its meetings by NGOs that support the organization's general objectives, and which can demonstrate an interest in the species managed by IBSFC. Any NGO wishing to participate must notify the Secretary at least 65 days before the meeting, providing certain information including: the aims and purposes of the organization, a brief history of the organization and a description of its activities, and details of representative papers or other similar resources produced by or for the organization on the conservation, management or science of fishery resources to which the Convention applies.

The applications are reviewed by the IBSFC Secretary and the Contracting Parties notified. NGO status may be granted unless one or more of the Contracting Parties objects to the application, in which case there will be a textual vote. Any NGO admitted to a meeting may: attend meetings but may not vote; make oral statements at the opening of the meetings at the invitation of the Chairman and distribute documents through the Secretariat. NGOs may engage in other activities as appropriate but only with the approval of the Chairman. The use of films, videos and tape-recording devices is not permitted. NGOs are required to pay a fee to cover any additional expenses generated by their participation. Observers receive the same documentation generally available to IBSFC's Contracting Parties except that deemed to be confidential. Observers are required to comply with all rules and procedures applicable to other participants at the meeting. Failure to do so may result in removal from the meeting and revocation of observer status. Furthermore, the general conduct of NGOs with observer status outside the meetings vis-à-vis IBSFC and representatives of the Contracting Parties shall be without reproach, and non-adherence to this rule may lead to suspension of observer status for one or more meetings. With regard to communications, following a session of the IBSFC, the Secretary immediately issues an agreed Press Release and updates the IBSFC website. The Secretary also transmits copies of the proceedings of the meeting and other publications to all observer organizations and, on request, to other organizations. There are no specific rules concerning NGOs and press releases.

International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO), North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC)

The rules governing NGOs at ICCAT, NAFO and NEAFC and the activities permitted during meetings of these organizations are generally very similar to those of IBSFC but these

organizations do not have a rule concerning conduct of observers outside the meetings. While the Rules of ICCAT, NAFO, NEAFC and IBSFC do not specifically refer to statements to the media by NGOs, the Secretary of NAFO has advised that NAFO's practice has been that no statement is permitted until after the conclusion of the meeting when the NAFO Secretariat issues a Press Release. Attendance by the media at NAFO meetings is restricted to 5-10 minutes of the Opening Session of the General Council. ICCAT, NAFO, NEAFC and IBSFC all have a rule indicating that NGOs must comply with rules and procedures applicable to other participants at the meetings, which presumably could be applied to contact with the media during meetings.

North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission (NAMMCO)

NGOs may apply for observer status to NAMMCO no later than 90 days before the Council meeting, providing information on the role, functions and operations of their organizations and other information necessary for the Council to assess the application. Once an NGO has been admitted as an observer the status shall continue for such time as no objection by any Contracting Party is raised on the matter. Observers may make statements and submit relevant documents to the meetings at the discretion of the Chairman. The Council of NAMMCO may establish a fee for attendance of observers at its meetings. The issue of media attendance has not been resolved within NAMMCO, although press and media are invited to attend opening sessions but, in general, meetings are closed to the press. NAMMCO's Rules of Procedure also state that reports will not be released to the public until they have been dealt with by the Council. The Secretary of NAMMCO is of the opinion that this rule in effect means that participants at NAMMCO meetings may not "issue a report or press release from a meeting until after the Council's press release has been issued, or the reports from the meetings have been approved by the Council."

International Whaling Commission (IWC)

Under IWC's Rules of Procedure, any international organization with offices in more than three countries may be represented at meetings of the Commission by an observer if that organization has previously attended any meeting of the Commission or if it submits a request in writing to the Commission and the Commission issues an invitation (the interpretation of the term 'international' has been relaxed in recent years). The Commission will levy a registration fee and determine rules of conduct and may define other conditions for attendance of observers. Once accredited, an international organization remains accredited until the Commission decides otherwise. Observers are admitted to all meetings of the Commission and the Technical Committee and their subsidiary groups but not the Commissioners-only meetings or the Finance and Administration Committee meetings. Observers may submit Opening Statements which are included in the official documentation of the meeting. The content of the Opening Statements shall be relevant to matters under consideration by the Commission and shall be in the form of views and comments made to the Commission rather than directed at any individual or group of Contracting Governments. Under the IWC's Rules of Conduct for Observers, use of audio and/or visual recording equipment in meetings of Committees at Working Groups is prohibited, quotations from or use of draft documents is prohibited, and failure to conform with the Commission's rules may result in withdrawal of accreditation. IWC's experience of observers has, in the opinion of their Secretary, been similar to NASCO's, i.e. such participation has been of mutual benefit and there have been few problems, but occasionally problems have arisen as a result of the issuing of material by IWC's NGOs to the media.