Council



Proposed Decisions on the 'Draft of an Action Plan for NASCO'

CNL(25)13

Agenda item: 6.b)

Proposed Decisions on the 'Draft of an Action Plan for NASCO'

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to provide Council with the proposed decisions, and rationale for them, from the WGFON that met from 19-21 March in Edinburgh.

Decisions

Council agrees that:

- recommendations EPR1, EPR4, EPR5, EPR26, EPR46 and IP11 should be considered at the 2025 Annual Meeting for decision;
- recommendations EPR1, EPR4, EPR5, EPR26, EPR46 and IP11 not be included in the high-level Action Plan but be agreed by Council and recorded in the 2025 Annual Meeting Report, as follows:

Council requests that:

- o the Standing Scientific Committee (SSC) considers addressing recommendations EPR1 and EPR5 in the 2025 Request to ICES for Scientific Advice';
- the SSC considers addressing recommendation EPR4 in the 2025 Request to ICES for Scientific Advice ensuring that issues like climate change impacts on CLs would be incorporated in the request text;
- o following the 2025 Annual Meeting, the SSC considers, inter-sessionally, a broader discussion of the advice needed from ICES to enable delivery of NASCO's Ten-Year Strategy.

Council agrees that:

- o recommendation EPR26 is outside NASCO's remit and no action will, therefore, be taken; Council proposes that:
- o the Commissions consider whether there is a benefit to the provision of information to the Commissions on co-operative approaches to the management of salmon catchments that are shared with other jurisdictions.

Additionally, Council will discuss whether or not to convene a high-level (Ministerial) meeting (EPR46) and, subsequently, agree next steps.

Council further agrees that:

- recommendations TBSS2(1), TBSS2(3) and TBSS2(4) be added to the Annex 1 bullet relating to the incorporation of climate change as a key element of NASCO's Resolutions, Agreements and Guidelines (RAGs);
- the Terms of Reference to each Working Group revising NASCO's Resolutions, Agreements and Guidelines should be clear that the various recommendations addressing NASCO's key themes areas should be considered as possible examples of best practice that could be considered for incorporation into the revisions rather than instructions to carry out the specific tasks themselves;

- recommendations EPR8, EPR15 and EPR16 should be added to the 'Recommendation' column of the table in Annex 1 of CNL(24)71rev under the 'Habitat' RAGs, to join the recommendation T3 already in the table;
- recommendations EPR11, EPR18, EPR21, EPR22, T8 and T9 should be added to the 'Recommendation' column of the table in Annex 1 of CNL(24)71rev under the 'Aquaculture and disease' RAGS, to join the recommendations EPR19, EPR20 and EPR28 already in the table;
- recommendation EPR25 should be added to the 'Recommendation' column of the table in Annex 1 of CNL(24)71rev under the 'Management of salmon fisheries in the light of rapid change' RAGS, to join the recommendation EPR14 already in the table; and
- all 13 recommendations, i.e. TBSS2(1), TBSS2(3), TBSS2(4), EPR8, EPR11, EPR15, EPR16, EPR18, EPR21, EPR22, EPR25, T8 and T9, should be considered at the 2025 Annual Meeting for decision and be included as part of any update to the high-level Action Plan.

Background

In 2024, Council agreed 'The Future of NASCO – a Ten-Year Strategy' <u>CNL(24)71rev</u>. This included a high-level Action Plan.

The planning process that led to the creation of the Strategy and Action Plan, through meetings and deliberations of the Working Group on the Future of NASCO (WGFON), included the collation of 83 recommendations from various processes undertaken by NASCO since 2019 into a document 'Draft of an Action Plan for NASCO', <u>CNL(24)14</u>, together with a set of proposed actions for deliberation by Council at its 2024 Annual Meeting. The processes that gave rise to the 83 recommendations were: the 2023 External Performance Review (EPR); the 2023 Theme-based Special Session on climate change (TBSS); the 2023 / 2024 Working Group on the Future of NASCO (WGFON); the 2022 International Year of the Salmon Symposium (IYS); the 2019 Tromsø Symposium (T); and the 2019-2023 Implementation Plan review process (IP).

At its 2024 Annual Meeting, <u>CNL(24)88</u>, Council agreed ways forward to deal with the majority of the recommendations in the draft Action Plan, including a schedule for the revision of NASCO's Resolutions, Agreements and Guidelines specifically with all revised guidance to reflect adaptation to climate change (this schedule is Annex 1 in the Ten-Year Strategy). However, several of the recommendations required further consideration so Council agreed that the WGFON should continue its work.

In the margins of the 2024 Annual Meeting, the WGFON agreed that a subgroup of its members should meet inter-sessionally to review the recommendations and proposed actions from the draft Action Plan against the list of high-level NASCO actions agreed at the 2024 Annual Meeting to determine which items remained to be addressed; to consider each of those items against the relevance of each to the achievement of NASCO's Strategic Goal; and to recommend proposed, prioritised, actions for the consideration of the WGFON in spring 2025. To enable this work, the 'Charge to the Subgroup of the WGFON', WGFON(24)12, (Annex 1) was agreed. The subgroup met from 15-17 October 2024. It produced a set of recommendations for the WGFON itself to deliberate at its meeting in March 2025, as 'Recommendations from the WGFON Subgroup to WGFON', WGFON(25)07.

The WGFON deliberated on the subgroup's recommendations and makes the following recommendations to Council for its decision.

Recommendations to Council

Annex 2 lays out the recommendations from the WGFON to Council for its consideration.

1. Recommendations for Action by NASCO Bodies

The first six rows of the table in Annex 2 contain recommendations from the WGFON for decisions for the Council to consider and agree early in the 2025 Annual Meeting such that those actions can be taken during the Meeting by the NASCO bodies mentioned. Five of the recommendations are for further action, one is that no action be taken by the Council on that recommendation.

The WGFON recommends to Council that all six recommendations should be considered at the 2025 Annual Meeting for decision.

Finally, the WGFON considered that the majority of the recommendations would not need to be included in the high-level Action Plan. Rather, those decisions could be recorded by Council in the same manner as the decisions on other recommendations in the draft Action Plan that are listed under paragraph 6.12 in the 2024 Council Annual Meeting Report, CNL(24)88. However, there is one possible exception to this – should a high political-level Ministerial-type meeting be agreed, the WGFON agreed that would warrant inclusion in the high-level Action Plan.

The WGFON recommends to Council, therefore, that recommendations EPR1, EPR4, EPR5, EPR26, EPR46 and IP11 not be included in the high-level Action Plan but be agreed by Council and recorded in the 2025 Annual Meeting Report.

2. Recommendations for Inclusion in Annex 1 of CNL(24)71rev

Annex 1 of <u>CNL(24)71rev</u> lays out the prioritisation of the revision of NASCO's Resolutions, Agreements and Guidelines (RAGs), together with the RAGs to be updated, a set of bullets to inform the cross-cutting directions and assignments for all revisions and the recommendations to be considered by the Working Groups carrying out the revisions.

The WGFON considered all of the recommendations in the draft Action Plan that it had previously been considered to relate to the revision of NASCO's RAGs.

It agreed that three of the recommendations are related to the bullets to inform the cross-cutting directions and assignments for all revisions and ten are related to the recommendations to be considered by the Working Groups carrying out the revisions – see Annex 3.

Bullets to inform the cross-cutting directions and assignments for all revisions

The WGFON recommends to Council that recommendations TBSS2(1), TBSS2(3) and TBSS2(4) be added to the Annex 1 bullet relating to the incorporation of climate change as a key element of NASCO's RAGs – see Annex 3.

Recommendations to be considered by the Working Groups carrying out the revisions

The WGFON discussed the charge to the Working Groups that will be tasked with carrying out the revisions to NASCO's RAGs and proposed that the recommendations that it considered to be relevant to those Working Groups are not instructions to the WGs to carry out those specific tasks. Rather, they provide information to consider, that may be examples of best practice that could be considered for incorporation into the revisions. With this in mind, and the recognition that the Terms of Reference to each WG will be developed in line with the timetable agreed by Council in 2024, **the WGFON recommends to Council** that the Terms of Reference to each Working Group revising NASCO's Resolutions, Agreements and Guidelines should be clear that the various recommendations addressing NASCO's key themes areas should be considered as possible examples of best practice that could be considered for incorporation into the revisions rather than instructions to carry out the specific tasks themselves.

Given that consideration, the WGFON discussed whether the relevant recommendations should be added to the 'Link to recommendations in CNL(24)14' column in the high level Action Plan in the rows relating to the revisions of each of the sets of RAGs, i.e.

Action Plan

				inemes				
Objective	Timing	Action	Fisheries	Habitat	AITT	Status	Commentary	Link to recommendations in CNL(24)14

. . . .

	Delivery by Theme-based / Expert Working Groups						
Guide	2024	Update Stocking Guidelines			x	Stocking Guidelines agreed at 2024 AM; stock re-building guidelines to be reviewed after 2024 AM	
(2) 6	2025/26	Update habitat restoration guidelines		х		Future action; agreed at 2024 AM, based on discussion of Annex 1	
	2026/27	Update aquaculture guidelines			х	Future action; agreed at 2024 AM, based on discussion of Annex 1	
	2027/28	Update fisheries guidelines	х			Future action; agreed at 2024 AM, based on discussion of Annex 1	

or be included in the 'Recommendation' column of the table in Annex 1 of CNL(24)71rev under the relevant sets of guidance to be revised, i.e.

Text Rec	commendation	Action	Timeline	Comments
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Given that the high-level Action Plan is a document recording high-level actions, the WGFON preferred that, rather than replace 'several' in the 'Link to recommendations in CNL(24)14', the recommendations be added to the 'Recommendation' column of the table in Annex 1 of CNL(24)71rev.

The WGFON recommends that the following three recommendations should be added to the 'Recommendation' column of the table in Annex 1 of CNL(24)71rev under the 'Habitat' RAGs, to join the recommendation T3 already in the table: EPR8, EPR15 and EPR16 – see Annex 3.

The WGFON recommends that the following six recommendations should be added to the 'Recommendation' column of the table in Annex 1 of CNL(24)71rev under the 'Aquaculture and disease' RAGS, to join the recommendations EPR19, EPR20 and EPR28 already in the table: EPR11, EPR18, EPR21, EPR22, T8 and T9 – see Annex 3.

Finally, **the WGFON recommends** that the following recommendation should be added to the 'Recommendation' column of the table in Annex 1 of CNL(24)71rev under the 'Management of salmon fisheries in the light of rapid change' RAGS, to join the recommendation EPR14 already in the table: EPR25 – see Annex 3.

Priorities

Finally, as with the six recommendations for action by NASCO bodies, the WGFON considered that the 13 recommendations included in this section are all relatively easy requests of the Council and, therefore, should all be considered at the 2025 Annual Meeting for decision and to be included as part of any update to the high-level Action Plan.

The WGFON recommends to Council, therefore, that all 13 recommendations should be considered at the 2025 Annual Meeting for decision and be included as part of any update to the high-level Action Plan.

Secretariat Edinburgh 10 April 2025

WGFON(24)12

Charge to the Subgroup of the WGFON

Taking into account:

1. NASCO's Strategic Goal, i.e.

'Within the next 10 years, NASCO's goal is to prioritise and drive actions necessary to slow the decline of wild Atlantic salmon populations and demonstrate that restoration is possible.'

and

- 2. NASCO's high-level actions document agreed at the 2024 Annual Meeting, in <u>CNL(24)71</u> In the inter-sessional period between the 2024 and 2025 Annual Meetings, the WGFON subgroup is tasked with the following charge:
- 1) Reviewing the recommendations and proposed actions from the Draft of an Action Plan for NASCO, <u>CNL(24)14</u> against the list of high-level NASCO actions agreed at the 2024 Annual Meeting, <u>CNL(24)71</u> to determine which items remain to be addressed.
- 2) Considering each of these remaining recommendations / proposed actions and evaluating the relevance of each to the achievement of NASCO's Strategic Goal;
- 3) Prioritising each remaining recommendation / proposed action regarding its ability to enable the Strategic Goal to be achieved within the next 10 years; and
- 4) Recommending, by January 20, 2025, to the WGFON
 - (a) proposed actions and potential timelines
 - (b) which recommendations/proposed actions should not be taken forward at this point in time, along with the rationale.

The WGFON will review the prioritised list and consult with the subgroup as necessary.

The WGFON will finalise the recommended priorities and provide them to Council by 30 April 2025, for consideration for inclusion in the 2025 iteration of the action plan.

Working Methods for the WGFON Subgroup

The subgroup should use the following working methods:

- the subgroup should meet inter-sessionally as required, to address its Charge;
- meetings shall be via video conference;
- the subgroup will decide how to conduct its business to allow it to address its Charge effectively;
- in conducting its work, the subgroup may wish to communicate with, and request information from, experts in the field;
- the subgroup should seek consensus in agreeing its prioritised list of recommendations / proposed actions;

- the Secretariat will provide logistical support and background information, as requested; and
- the subgroup should submit its prioritised list recommendations / proposed actions to the WGFON by January 20, 2025. The WGFON will then refine the list and finalise its recommendations to be provided to Council of NASCO for consideration at the 2025 Annual Meeting, no later than 30 April 2025.

President and Secretary Edinburgh 2 July 2024

Annex 2

Recommendations Proposed for Action by the WGFON

EPR etc. Recommendation No.	EPR etc. Recommendation Text	WGFON Recommendation to Council
EPR1	NASCO investigates the reasons for the continuing decreasing PFAs in the NEAC to evaluate if more conservative (i.e. higher) SERs and CLs are needed to	Council requests that the Standing Scientific Committee (SSC) considers addressing this recommendation in the 2025 Request to ICES for Scientific Advice Additionally,
stop or revert the declining trends	Council requests that, following the 2025 Annual Meeting, the SSC considers inter-sessionally a broader discussion of the advice needed from ICES to enable delivery of NASCO's Ten-Year Strategy	
	NASCO arranges review of most appropriate basis to set CLs for stock complexes and for individual river stocks; i.e. should pseudo stock and recruitment	Council requests that the SSC considers addressing this recommendation in the 2025 Request to ICES for Scientific Advice ensuring that issues like climate change impacts on CLs would be incorporated in the request text
EPR4	relationships be used or are other approaches to be preferred. CLs should be revised accordingly if necessary	Additionally, Council requests that, following the 2025 Annual Meeting, the SSC considers inter-sessionally a broader discussion of the advice needed from ICES to enable delivery of NASCO's Ten-Year Strategy
EPR5	NASCO requests ICES to ensure that its catch statistics on catch and release fisheries acknowledge the fact that some of the released salmon will die	Council requests that the SSC considers addressing this recommendation in the 2025 Request to ICES for Scientific Advice

	T	T
		Additionally,
		Council requests that, following the 2025 Annual Meeting, the SSC considers inter-sessionally a broader discussion of the advice needed from ICES to enable delivery of NASCO's Ten-Year Strategy
EPR26	NASCO considers adopting port State measures if there are indications of significant IUU fishing for salmon on the high seas and by foreign vessels within coastal State maritime zones, and port State measures are determined to be an effective response	Council agrees that this recommendation is outside NASCO's remit so no action will be taken
EPR46	NASCO should consider other actions aimed at elevating salmon conservation to a higher political level, for instance by periodically convening high-level (Ministerial) segments to Annual NASCO Meetings. A possible topic for such a high-level segment could be the management of Atlantic salmon aquaculture	WGFON considers that the comms / outreach strategy should address most of the recommendation. However, it recommends that the specific element related to a possible high-level meeting would need to be discussed further by Council to understand timelines etc.
IP11	Jurisdictions provide information on co-operative approaches to the management of salmon catchments that are shared with other jurisdictions. This would include information on how fisheries are managed for the full catchment (e.g. quotas, Conservation Limits, catch returns, habitat plans, regulations)	Council proposes that the Commissions consider whether there is a benefit to the provision of this information to the Commissions
TBSS2(1)	Parties / jurisdictions consider taking a strategic multidisciplinary approach when developing and implementing their climate adaptive management measures. All reasonable opportunities should be taken to incorporate wider stakeholder views into decision making, including where appropriate, collaboration with other agencies, Non-Governmental Organizations, and all relevant stakeholders	

TBSS2(3)	Parties / jurisdictions consider incorporating eight identified best practices as part of their climate adaptive management strategy: a. Increase access to and implement protection of thermal refuges to mitigate effects of increases in water temperatures in salmon rivers; b. Restore and maintain connectivity when it is compromised by climate change related effects. For example, river flows, estuarine thermal barriers, renewable energy infrastructures; c. Develop a strategically designed, quality controlled national river temperature monitoring network; d. Develop 'warm water protocols' for recreational fishing to minimise the negative impacts of catch and release on recreationally caught salmon; e. Management strategies that seek to improve the climate resilience of rivers with consideration for nature-based solutions13; f. Ensure that genetic and phenotypic diversity of all salmon populations is maintained to optimise their adaptive capacity; g. Maintain existing and, where appropriate, initiate new long-term population monitoring programs (e.g. life stage abundance and distribution, life history traits, harvest, origin) to provide critical data needed to evaluate population dynamics in the face of a changing climate; and h. Identify actual or potential invasive biota and pathogens presenting risk to wild salmon, whose occurrence may be increased by climate change; develop and apply remedial measures	Council agrees the inclusion of these recommendation numbers in the climate change-related bullet in Annex 1 of CNL(24)71rev, i.e. to add to the recommendations EPR9 and TBSS1(3) already included there
TBSS2(4)	Parties / jurisdictions consider identifying knowledge gaps that are preventing effective management actions to mitigate the impacts of climate change. These knowledge gaps could be collectively reviewed to assess if NASCO can facilitate the information sharing needed, or if a request for scientific advice from NASCO to ICES would be needed	

		,			
EPR8	NASCO arrange for the development of Salmon Habitat Protection and Restoration Plans, produced on an individual river system basis				
EPR15	NASCO considers facilitating the operationalisation of the IPs by directing Parties and jurisdictions to develop specific Salmon Habitat Protection and Restoration Plans as envisaged and set out in CNL(01)51 and operationalized further in CNL(10)51	Council agrees to include these recommendation numbers in the 'Recommendation' column of the 'Habitat' section in the Annex 1 Table, i.e. to add to the recommendation T3 already included there			
EPR16	NASCO directs the adoption of a pressure and actions mapping tool approach for targeting habitat stressors in aquatic environments, including sensitivity to climate change				
EPR11	NASCO considers developing innovative approaches deploying available technologies (sampling, genetics, electronic fish counters), recognising that substantial population structuring occurs within many large river systems and that this can have ramifications for the management of fisheries and the protection of biodiversity – especially in the case of genetic introgression from farm escapes				
EPR18	NASCO Parties create dedicated, independent government inspectorates with accompanying legal regulatory powers to effectively implement relevant NASCO instruments to address the impacts of sea lice and farmed escapes				
EPR21	Parties / jurisdictions carry out routine and systematic monitoring of rivers for the quantification of genetic introgression in individual rivers across the species distribution similar to those programs being deployed currently in Norway and Scotland Norwegian sea lice pressure assessment protocol be	Council agrees to include these recommendation numbers in the 'Recommendation' column of the 'Aquaculture and			
EPR22	adopted in all salmon farming areas across the species	disease section in the Annex 1 Table, i.e. to add to the			

	range taking account of lice loads, lice contact zones	recommendations EPR19, EPR20 and EPR28 already
	and estimates of lice drift	included there
	Given the continued impacts of domestic salmon	
	farming on wild salmon, NASCO should strengthen	
	compliance to the agreed international goals of '100%	
	farmed fish to be retained in all production facilities	
T8	and, 100% of farms to have effective sea lice	
10	management such that there is no increase in sea lice	
	loads or lice-induced mortality of wild salmonids	
	attributable to the farms'. This is as stated in the 2009	
	'Guidance on Best Management Practices to Address	
	Impacts of Sea Lice and Escaped Farmed Salmon'	
	NASCO should establish a new goal to prevent the	
	spread of disease pathogens from fish farms to wild fish	
	consistent with the existing goals on containment and	
T9	sea lice in the 2009 'Guidance on Best Management	
	Practices to Address Impacts of Sea Lice and Escaped	
	Farmed Salmon', and the 2016 'Theme-based Special	
	Session: Addressing Impacts of Salmon Farming on	
	Wild Atlantic Salmon'	
	NASCO and its Parties strengthen their efforts to	Council agrees to include this recommendation number in the
	decrease unreported catches in all salmon fisheries	'Recommendation' column of the 'Management of salmon
EPR25	conducted by NASCO Parties. NASCO could consider	fisheries in the light of rapid change' section in the Annex 1
	commissioning an external independent assessment of	Table, i.e. to add to the recommendation EPR14 already
	unreported catches	included there

Proposed Revisions to Annex 1 of CNL(24)71rev Prioritisation of Revision of Resolutions, Agreements and Guidelines

Cross-cutting Directions and Assignments for all Revisions / Updates:

- all to include updated knowledge, science, and best practices (EPR45)
- all to specifically incorporate responding to climate change as a key element of guidelines (EPR9, TBSS1(3), TBSS2(1), TBSS2(3), TBSS2(4))
- all to incorporate social, economic factors and local and indigenous knowledge as an element of the guidelines (T3 + Guidelines for incorporating social and economic factors in decisions under the Precautionary Approach (CNL(04)57))
- all to incorporate the Precautionary Approach (<u>CNL(98)46</u>)
- all to incorporate all relevant international agreements, guidelines, and best practices such as the agreement on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction
- all to consider all identified documents and whether they can be merged, revised, or redrafted based on developments since they were agreed.

Text	Recommendation	Action	Timeline	Comments
 Stocking: Guidelines on the Use of Stock Rebuilding Programmes in the Context of the Precautionary Management of Salmon Stocks (CNL(04)55) Recommendation on gene banking 	EPR4 T2 EPR23	Revision	2024-2025	WG already established. Stocking Guidelines agreed at the 2024 Annual Meeting. Updated ToRs for Stocking Guidelines WG agreed at the 2024 Annual Meeting. Work to continue on CNL(04)55 and EPR23 for delivery at 2025 Annual Meeting
Habitat:	EPR8 EPR15 EPR16	Revision	2025-2026	WG to be established via ToRs at 2025 Annual Meeting.

• Guidelines for the Protection, Restoration and Enhancement of Atlantic Salmon Habitat	Т3			Revision to be agreed at 2026 Annual Meeting
 Aquaculture and disease: Guidance on Best Management Practices to Address Impacts of Sea Lice and Escaped Farmed Salmon on Wild Salmon Stocks (SLG(09)5) Guidelines on Containment of Farm Salmon (CNL(01)53) 	EPR11 EPR18 EPR19 EPR20 EPR21 EPR22 EPR28 T8 T9	Revision	2026-2027	WG to be established via ToRs at 2026 Annual Meeting. Revision to be agreed at 2027 Annual Meeting
 Management of salmon fisheries in the light of rapid change: Management of Salmon Fisheries (CNL(09)43) Guidelines on Catch and Release Minimum Standard for Catch Statistics (CNL(93)51) Decision Structure For Management of North Atlantic Salmon Fisheries (CNL31.332 / 2002) 	EPR14 EPR25	Revision	2027-2028	WG to be established via ToRs at 2027 Annual Meeting. Revision to be agreed at 2028 Annual Meeting
NASCO Handbook of Basic Texts	EPR33		Continuously	Secretariat to continue to update the 'Officers' and other relevant sections of the Handbook online each year after the Annual Meeting