

West Greenland Commission

Report on the Atlantic Salmon Fishery 2021 - 2025
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REPORT ON THE ATLANTIC SALMON FISHERY

2021-2025

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1. Background and introduction

This report describes and illustrates the development of the Atlantic salmon fishery in Greenland over the period 2021-2025.

The period of validity of the management plan for the Atlantic salmon fishery in Greenland expires on 31 December 2025. Accordingly, the management plan is due for revision. The management plan has been in force since 1 July 2021, and has thus covered the seasons 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025. The purpose of this report is therefore to gather and present facts about the fishery that can form a basis for the revision of the management plan.

The management plan was drawn up in collaboration with the stakeholders in the fishery, and a working group was established to discuss the management of the salmon fishery in Greenland. Among the topics discussed was the division of West Greenland into two to three management areas, with staggered seasons, in order to ensure that fishers throughout the region would be given the opportunity to participate in the fishery. Work was carried out on distribution keys based on historical catch data, as well as a proposal for a maximum number of nets for commercial fishers. In addition, stricter reporting requirements, improved data collection, and consideration of international obligations were discussed, including cooperation with the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation (NASCO). Proposals for regulating the Kapisillit salmon were also included in the work.

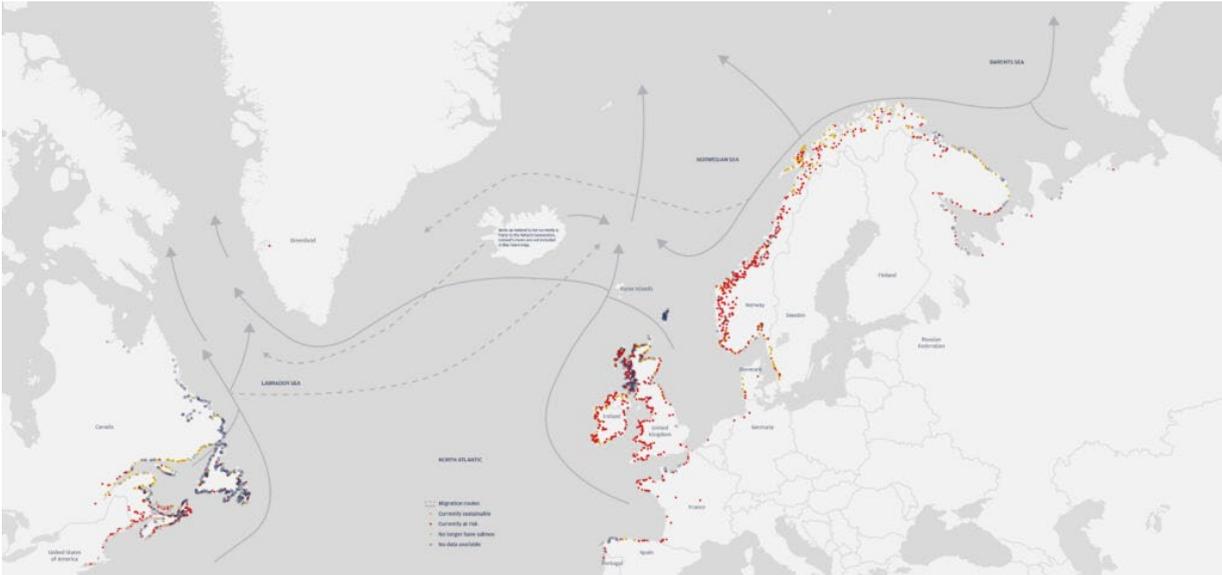
2. Current regulation

2.1 Legislation and regulation

The salmon fishery is regulated by the management plan for Atlantic salmon and by Government of Greenland Executive Order no. 59 of 1 August 2025 on Salmon Fishery, Government of Greenland Executive Order no. 72 of 4 November 2025 on the Technical Regulation of Fishing, and Government of Greenland Executive Order no. 10 of 4 February 2025 on Licences and Quotas for Fishing. The executive orders are laid down pursuant to Greenland Parliamentary Act no. 29 of 23 May 2024 on Fishery.

The fishery for Atlantic salmon is divided into two management areas in West Greenland and one management area in East Greenland. Fishing for Atlantic salmon may only take place inshore, which is defined as within 3 nautical miles of the baseline.

The Atlantic salmon migrate to Greenland in the summer, where they initially arrive in South Greenland and then move north, primarily along the west coast. Taking account of this staggered arrival of the salmon up along the west coast, staggered opening times for the fishing are set for the two management areas, north and south, respectively.



Source: NASCO, <https://salmonatsea.com/atlantic-salmon/rivers-database/>

The fishery is subject to licensing requirements. Licences for both commercial and recreational fishing for Atlantic salmon are issued by the Ministry of Fisheries, Hunting, Agriculture and Self-Sufficiency.

2.2. Data foundation

The data in this report has been drawn from LULI, the fishing and catch database of the Ministry of Fisheries, Hunting, Agriculture and Self-Sufficiency, as well as from the annual reports to the West Greenlandic Commission in NASCO.

The data relates to licences, quotas and catches.

3. Scientific advice

The scientific advice for the salmon fishery in Greenland is drawn up by ICES and forms the basis for the negotiations in NASCO. The advice is based on a comprehensive dataset which shows that the salmon fished in Greenland mainly originates from foreign stocks. The fishery is therefore described as a mixed fishery, which obliges Greenland to take into account international agreements and conservation goals.

For a number of years, the advice has been that there should be no direct fishing for Atlantic salmon. However, as an indigenous people Greenland has a right to fish salmon for subsistence purposes. The ICES approach is based on a risk-based principle, in which fishing should only be permitted if there is at least a 75% likelihood that the conservation goals in key areas can be met.

4. Determination of the TAC

The total allowable catch (TAC) for the salmon fishery is determined annually by the Government of Greenland on the basis of the agreement under the West Greenland Commission in NASCO (Multi-annual Regulatory Measures, (WGC(22)10)). To ensure balanced access to fishing throughout the country, the Government of Greenland distributes the TAC in management areas on the basis of historical catch data. This approach supports the goal of equal access to the resources. A fixed quota is set for the East Greenland

management area on the basis of catches from the past 10 years, which at the same time ensures that the progression in East Greenland from hunters to fishers can be supported.

4.1 Distribution keys between management areas

According to the management plan, the total quota for the salmon fishery is divided between three geographical management areas, in order to ensure balanced access to the resource. The distribution key is based on historical catch patterns and local fishing needs. Northwest receives 40% of the total quota, while Southwest is allocated 60%. For East Greenland, a fixed annual quota of 3 tons is set.

Table 1: Distribution keys between the management areas

Management area	Distribution key
Northwest	40%
Southwest	60%
East Greenland	Fixed annual quota of 3 tons

4.2 Distribution keys between commercial and recreational fishers

After the distribution between the management areas, the quota is then distributed in each area between commercial and recreational fishers. In the Northwest area, 28% of the total quota goes to commercial fishers and 12% to recreational fishers. In the Southwest, 42% of the total quota goes to commercial fishers and 18% to recreational fishers. In East Greenland the quota is divided equally, with 50% allocated to each group.

Table 2: Distribution keys between commercial and recreational fishers

Management area	Distribution key 1		Distribution key 2
Northwest	40%	Commercial fishers	28% ¹
		Recreational fishers	12% ¹
Southwest	60%	Commercial fishers	42% ¹
		Recreational fishers	18% ¹
East Greenland	Fixed annual quota of 3 tons	Commercial fishers	50% ²
		Recreational fishers	50% ²
¹ Percentage distribution of the quota for West Greenland			
² Percentage distribution of the quota for East Greenland			

5. Regulatory mechanisms

The fishery for Atlantic salmon in Greenland is subject to a number of regulatory mechanisms aimed at ensuring control, transparency and structured management. The regulation covers the setting of quota amounts, licence requirements, provisions on fishing periods, technical conservation measures and the handling of bycatch and invasive species.

5.1 Quota amounts

The fishery is regulated through time-limited licences with no individual quota allocations, which makes it an Olympic fishery. A total quota is set for each management area which is fished by all the licensees in the area. Once the total quota for an area has been fished, the fishery in that area is closed. It is not possible to transfer quotas between geographical areas or between years.

5.2 Licences

All fishing for salmon requires a licence, regardless of the form of fishing used. The purpose of the licence requirement is to ensure control and sustainable management of the resource, as well as to maintain an overview of the number of fishers. All of the actors are subject to the applicable rules for registration and reporting. Licences can only be issued to vessels up to and including 12.8 metres (42 feet) in length, which reflects the nature of the fishery as a small coastal fishery.

To obtain a licence for salmon fishing, a number of requirements must be met. The applicant must have had permanent residence in Greenland. In addition, previous licensees must have complied with the reporting obligation by submitting reports on their fishing in a timely manner during the preceding year. These criteria ensure that licences are awarded only to individuals with permanent ties to the country, and that the fishery management can be based on valid data.

Licences may be applied for online via the citizen portal sullissivik.gl, or by contacting the local municipal office in person. The requirements apply to both commercial and recreational fishers, and support responsible and transparent access to fishing for Atlantic salmon.

5.3 Fishing period

The Government of Greenland determines the start time for the commercial salmon fishing periods after consultation with the local fishing associations, pursuant to section 10 (1) of Government of Greenland Executive Order no.12 of 4 February 2025 on the Technical Regulation of Fishing. This procedure is designed to ensure local involvement and adaptation to regional conditions in the management of fisheries. As the start time may differ between the various areas, the closing times may also vary between the areas.

The fishing takes place with set nets in late summer and autumn along the entire west coast of Greenland, but begins at staggered times. It commences in the south when the salmon arrive, and moves north as the salmon migrate north. Emptying of nets is done using dinghies and rubber dinghies. A report must be submitted each time a net is emptied.

5.4 Technical conservation measures

The legislation lays down a number of technical requirements and restrictions for both commercial and non-commercial fishing.

Commercial fishers may only use hooks or up to 20 nets with a mesh size of at least 140 mm in stretched dimensions. The nets may be used in linked units up to a maximum of five nets.

For non-commercial fishing, the use of hooks, fishing rods or a single net with up to 2,000 knots and a minimum mesh size of 140 mm in stretched dimensions is permitted.

In addition, all fishers are required to clearly mark the salmon net with the owner's full name, on a label made of water-resistant material.

5.5 Bycatch

Bycatch in the fishery must be handled and registered in accordance with the Government of Greenland Executive Order on Bycatch in Fishery. The executive order defines bycatch as catches of any living organisms not covered by the fishing licence.

If, in reports or inspections, a high bycatch of a given species is found during a particular period of time or in a specific geographical area, the Ministry of Fisheries, Hunting, Agriculture and Self-Sufficiency, in consultation with the Greenland Institute of Natural Resources and the Fisheries Council, must assess whether special measures will need to be taken to ensure that the bycatch can be maintained at an acceptable level, taking into account the biological status of the species. Such precautions may include closure of the fishery in some areas or during certain periods, or other measures to ensure that no species is burdened beyond its biological potential.

In the period 2021-2025, there have been no examples of the Ministry being required to react in relation to the level of bycatch.

5.6 Pink salmon

Pink salmon is an invasive species in the North Atlantic that has begun to be found in Greenland. Pink salmon originated in the Pacific Ocean and were introduced to Russian rivers in the mid-twentieth century for commercial fishing. Pink salmon have a two-year life cycle, which means that the incidence typically varies significantly between even and odd years.

In 2021, five pink salmon that had spawned were recorded and removed from the Kapisillit River. No individuals were however observed in 2023, and analyses of eDNA samples showed no evidence of the presence of the species in the river.

No quota has been set for fishing for pink salmon, and fishing for this species is therefore free. Catches of pink salmon may be reported in the same way as for Atlantic salmon (see section 4 on reporting). Photos and information about the time and place of the catch, etc., may be sent to the Greenland Institute of Natural Resources.

6. Fishery

The quota for the salmon fishery in the years 2021-2025 remained unaltered at 30 tonnes, with 27 tonnes for West Greenland and 3 tonnes for East Greenland. The quota is a total quota for both commercial and recreational fishers, and is fished as an Olympic fishery. Within each management area, the quota is further subdivided between commercial and recreational fishers.

In accordance with the agreement with NASCO, there is an ban on exports of wild Atlantic salmon and products of this from Greenland, as well as a ban on landing and selling salmon to fish factories. The fishery is subsistence fishing for own consumption. Professional fishers can sell catch at the local open air markets or to institutions.

6.1 Quota uptake

In this section we present the trend in quota uptake for the salmon fishery in the period 2021-2025. The table shows the overall catch broken down by management area and by commercial and recreational fishery.

Catches per management area in the period 2021-2025, in tonnes.

Table 3: Quota uptake in 2021-2025

Management area	Catch 2021	Catch 2022	Catch 2023	Catch 2024	Catch 2025
Northwest (NAFO 1A + 1B + 1C)	17.2	8.94	14.51	6.95	10.33
<i>Commercial fishers</i>	13.94	7.47	12.12	5.93	9.21
<i>Recreational fishers</i>	3.26	1.47	2.39	1.02	1.12
Southwest (NAFO 1D + 1E + 1F)	20.48	17.18	18.42	12.87	18.29
<i>Commercial fishers</i>	14.82	10.89	12.49	9.41	13.2
<i>Recreational fishers</i>	5.66	6.29	5.93	3.46	5.08
East Greenland	0.98	0.63	1.37	0.96	0.99
<i>Commercial fishers</i>	0.42	0.27	0.58	0.31	0.13
<i>Recreational fishers</i>	0.56	0.36	0.79	0.65	0.86
Total quota uptake	38.66	26.75	34.3	20.78	29.61

The total salmon quota for the period 2021-2025 was set at 30 tonnes annually, divided into 27 tonnes for West Greenland and 3 tonnes for East Greenland.

The total quota uptake varied significantly during the period. In 2021, 38.66 tonnes were caught, which significantly exceeded the set quota. In 2022, the catch fell to 26.75 tonnes, while it rose again in 2023 to 34.3 tonnes. In 2024 a significant decrease to 20.78 tonnes occurred, after which the catch increased again in 2025 to 29.61 tonnes, which is close to the total quota, while in West Greenland the quota was exceeded by 1.6 tonnes.

Catches were clearly concentrated in the Southwest management area (NAFO 1D + 1E + 1F), which had the largest quota uptake throughout the period. Here, the catch ranged from 12.87 tonnes in 2024 to 20.48 tonnes in 2021. The area thereby constitutes the largest share of the total fishery.

In the management area Northwest (NAFO 1A + 1B + 1C), catches fluctuated between 6.95 tonnes in 2024 and 17.2 tonnes in 2021. A decrease occurred from 2021 to 2022, followed by an increase in 2023, a marked decrease in 2024 and a moderate rise again in 2025.

Throughout the period, East Greenland has had a very limited quota uptake compared to West Greenland. Catches have been between 0.63 tonnes (2022) and 1.37 tonnes (2023), which reflects the smaller quota share and the generally lower fishing pressure in the area.

Commercial fishers accounted for the majority of catches in both Northwest and Southwest. In Southwest, for example, commercial fishers landed between 9.41 and 14.82 tonnes annually during the period, while recreational fishers caught between 3.46 and 6.29 tonnes.

The same pattern is seen in Northwest, where commercial fishing accounted for the largest share of the catch. However, recreational fishing continued to contribute a significant proportion, especially in years with high overall catches.

In East Greenland the distribution is more even, and in several years the catch of the recreational fishers exceeded that of the commercial fishers.

Overall, the total national catch across the period was 150.1 tonnes, an average of 30.02 tonnes per year. The average annual catch was 1.12 tonnes less than the period 2016-2020, which was 31.14 tonnes.

Table 4: Percentage distribution of catches per management area 2021-2025, and percentage distribution between commercial and recreational fishers per management area.

Management area	2021 (%)	2022 (%)	2023 (%)	2024 (%)	2025 (%)	Overall average
Northwest (NAFO 1A + 1B + 1C)	44	33	42	33	35	37
Commercial fishers	81	84	84	85	89	84
Recreational fishers	19	16	16	15	11	16
Southwest (NAFO 1D + 1E + 1F)	53	64	54	62	62	59
Commercial fishers	72	63	68	73	72	69
Recreational fishers	28	37	32	27	28	31
East Greenland	3	2	4	5	3	4
Commercial fishers	43	43	42	32	14	35
Recreational fishers	57	57	58	68	86	65

6.2 Number of licences issued

The number of salmon licences issued in the period 2021 to 2025 remained relatively stable, although with a higher level in 2021, when 916 licences were issued. The greater number of licences issued in 2021 may have been due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to increased travel restrictions around the world. In subsequent years the number dropped to 757 in 2022, then rose again to 787 in 2023 and 808 in 2024. The trend generally reflects a stable interest in salmon fishing.

Table 5: Number of licences issued in 2021-2025

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Number of licences	916	757	787	808	753

6.3 Catch reporting

The table below shows the trend in the number of salmon licences issued and reporting behaviour among licensees during the period 2021 to 2025. It is divided into commercial and recreational fishers, and indicates whether and when catch data has been reported, including the difference between zero catch and actual catch.

Table 6: Catch reporting in the period 2021-2025

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
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<i>Salmon licences in the period 2021-2025</i>	Num ber	% share								
<i>Number of licences issued</i>										
Commercial fishers	359	39%	291	38%	288	36.6%	314	38.9%	293	38.9%
Recreational fishers	557	61%	466	62%	499	63.4%	494	61.1%	460	61.1%
Total	916	100%	757	100%	787	100%	808	100%	753	100%
<i>Number of reports</i>										
Number of licensees who reported	644	70%	513	68%	648	82.3%	638	79.0%	534	70.9%
Number of licensees who did not report	272	30%	244	32%	140	17.7%	170	21.0%	219	29.1%
Number of licensees who reported zero catch	227	25%	190	25%	293	45.2%	328	51.4%	206	38.6%
Number of licensees who reported only catches > 0 kg	417	46%	322	43%	354	54.8%	310	48.6%	328	61.4%
<i>Number of licensees who reported during the season</i>										
Reports of catch > 0 kg	992	54%	275	58%	182	28.1%	259	40.6%	230	43.1%
Reports of zero catch	127	7%	86	18%	68	10.5%	232	36.4%	169	31.6%
<i>Number of licensees who reported between the close of the season and the final reporting deadline</i>										
Reports of catch > 0 kg	433	23%	22	5%	118	18.2%	58	9.1%	74	13.9%
Reports of zero catch	143	8%	54	12%	156	24.1%	137	21.5%	152	28.5%
<i>Number of licensees who reported after the final reporting deadline</i>										
Reports of catch > 0 kg	77	4%	8	2%	54	8.3%	14	2.2%	23	4.3%
Reports of zero catch	77	4%	61	13%	111	17.1%	31	4.9%	78	14.6%

During the period, between 753 and 916 salmon licences were issued annually, of which recreational fishers consistently made up the majority (around 60%). The level of reporting has generally been increasing, from 68% in 2022 to 82.3% in 2023 and 79.0% in 2024, with a fall to 70.9% in 2025. The proportion of licensees who did not report fluctuated from 32% in 2022 to just 17-21% in 2023 and 2024, and 29.1% in 2025.

The proportion of reported zero catches increased from 25% in 2022 to 38.6% in 2025, reflecting increased awareness of the reporting obligation, regardless of whether or not a catch was made.

If we examine the time of the reports, the majority still report during the fishing season itself. However, the proportion reporting after the end of the season or after the final reporting deadline is still significant. In 2025, in particular, a large proportion of the reports (42.4%) were submitted between the end of the season and the deadline.

Overall, the figures show a positive development in the reporting culture, but also reveal the need for continuing follow-up and guidance, especially with a view to securing timely reporting and an increased understanding of the importance of zero reporting.

7. Communication

The salmon fishery differs markedly from other inshore fisheries in Greenland. Unlike commercial inshore fishery, where reporting is usually performed automatically via first sales facilities, the salmon fishers are themselves responsible for submitting reports to the Greenland Fisheries and Hunting Control Authority (GFJK). For recreational fishers in general there is usually free access to fishing without the requirement for a licence or reporting. In the salmon fishery, on the other hand, recreational fishers are subject to both licensing and reporting obligations.

This places special demands on the information efforts. The Ministry of Fisheries, Hunting, Agriculture and Self-Sufficiency and GFJK make use of a number of communication tools to support correct compliance and the agreement with NASCO, and to secure high reporting rates:

- SMS messages: Since 2022, the Ministry has sent regular SMS messages to fishers who have entered their mobile numbers on the app, in which they are reminded to report and obtain the status of the fishery. In the years 2022-2024, SMS messages were sent directly to licensees in the salmon fishery, both during and after the season. No SMS messages were sent in 2025, which may have had an impact on the reporting rate. In future, it is expected that SMS messages will be a regular part of the information campaigns in the salmon fishery.
- Press releases: Communications are produced for the public regarding TACs, the start and close of the fishery, and reporting. The press releases are also shared on the Facebook page of the Government of Greenland.
- Radio spots: Every year, a campaign on licensing and reporting requirements is launched on national radio and broadcast daily during the fishing season.
- Facebook ads: Facebook ads for online reporting at [Sullissivik.gl](https://sullissivik.gl). In 2026, GFJK will create its own Facebook page, which will amongst other things be used for information campaigns and announcements regarding the fishery.
- When licences are issued, an appendix is supplied on reporting and the rules of the fishery.

8. Summary

This report has collected and analysed the development of the fishery for Atlantic salmon in Greenland in the period 2021–2025, and provides the technical basis for revision of the current management plan.

The current expired management plan was drawn up in a working group of fisheries stakeholders. Among the key topics were the determination of management areas, the distribution keys for quotas and the division between commercial and recreational fishers. In connection with the upcoming revision, the working group must decide whether the current management areas in West Greenland should be retained or altered, and whether the current quota allocation provisions should be continued.

The fishery is regulated through national executive orders within the framework of international obligations, including the cooperation in NASCO. Throughout the period, the annual TAC has been set at 30 tonnes, divided between 27 tonnes for West Greenland and 3 tonnes for East Greenland. In West Greenland, the quota is divided between Northwest (40%) and Southwest (60%), after which it is further subdivided between commercial and recreational fishers according to the set distribution keys. The fishery is conducted as an Olympic fishery without individual quota allocation, in which the fishery is closed when the area's overall quota is fished out.

The total quota uptake in the period amounted to 150.1 tonnes, corresponding to an average of 30.02 tonnes annually. In 2021 and 2023 the overall quota was exceeded, while the years 2022 and especially 2024 were characterised by underutilisation. In 2025, the overall catch was close to the TAC, while the quota in West Greenland was exceeded by 1.6 tonnes. The catches are geographically concentrated in Southwest Greenland, which on average accounts for the largest share of the catch, while East Greenland represents a smaller and relatively stable share.

Commercial fishers collectively account for the majority of catches in both the Northwest and Southwest, where they account for an average of approximately 84% and 69% of catches in those areas, respectively. In East Greenland the distribution is more even, and in several years the share of the recreational fishers has exceeded that of the commercial fishers.

The number of licences issued has been between 753 and 916 annually, with a higher level in 2021 and a subsequent stabilisation. Recreational fishers generally make up around 60% of the licensees. The level of reporting has generally risen, with a reporting rate of 82.3% in 2023, but declining to 70.9% in 2025. The proportion of zero reports has increased over the period, indicating increased awareness of the reporting obligation. At the same time, a significant proportion of the reports are still submitted after the end of the season, which points to the need for continued information and follow-up efforts.

There has been no need during the period for special management interventions regarding bycatch, and the incidence of pink salmon has been limited and monitored.