Proposed Minimum Criteria for NASCO's Annual Meetings

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to inform a decision on the minimum requirements for NASCO's Annual Meetings.

Decision

Heads of Delegations may wish to adopt the Draft Minimum Meeting Model Standard for NASCO Annual Meetings as contained in Annex 1.

Background

The 2025 Annual Meeting

During its 2025 Annual Meeting, the Council agreed a 2026 budget of £53,000 to host a slimmed-down 2026 Annual Meeting. This reduced budget, when compared to previous annual meetings, was made possible through:

- replacing the daily delegate rate paid to the venue (which had included meeting room hire, lunch and refreshments) with meeting room hire only and a basic refreshments package;
- reducing the number of breakout rooms to two, plus the Secretariat Office;
- making no provision for a NASCO dinner or hospitality; and
- reducing audio-visual equipment and services.

Council agreed that the meeting model for future Annual Meetings would be discussed at an Inter-Sessional Meeting of the Council, ideally to be held in 2025.

The 2025 Inter-Sessional Meeting

At the subsequent 2025 Inter-Sessional Meeting of the Council, a number of decisions were taken on the format and funding of NASCO Annual Meetings from 2027 onwards. Among these decisions, it was agreed that:

> '*Based on the provisions and experience of the 2026 Annual Meeting, NASCO will adopt a baseline standard for the Annual Meeting. This standard should be minimal, designed to meet essential Annual Meeting requirements while aligning with constrained budgets*'

The 2026 Annual Meetings

The model agreed in 2025 was followed in 2026 with the following exceptions:

- a reception was held on the evening of Monday, 1 June. This reception was hosted and paid for by NASCO's accredited NGOs; and
- the hotel provided a third breakout room, free of charge, on Thursday, 4 June when multiple delegation meetings were requested at the same time.

Cost of Hosting the 2026 Annual Meetings

The total cost of the 2026 Annual Meetings, exclusive of VAT, was approximately £42,500, more than £10,000 under budget. Additionally, the hotel has agreed to refund almost £1,200 after failing to provide the contracted internet services in the main meeting space.

Comments on the 2026 Annual Meetings

The Secretariat issued an informal survey to in-person participants at the 2026 Annual Meeting, and a further survey was sent to Heads of Delegations following the Annual Meeting. To preserve anonymity, these responses will not be included in this paper. However, the responses provided have been considered in developing the Draft Minimum Meeting Model Standard.

Meeting Room Space

In general, the reduced meeting room space worked well.

One issue raised was that the room layout during Special Sessions prevented the flow of the Sessions as intended. This is more important for some Special Sessions, such as Theme-based Special Sessions, or others where external speakers are invited to participate. The Draft Minimum Meeting Model Standard notes that a separate room may be beneficial for this purpose but not essential.

With regard to delegation meeting space, challenges were encountered in two areas: around Heads of Delegation Meetings and on Thursday, when the hotel allowed the use of another room at no additional cost. Without this, the Secretariat would not have been able to accommodate all requests for delegation meetings.

Therefore, the Draft Minimum Meeting Model Standard includes an additional small room that would be booked only for scheduled Heads meetings. This would allow the Secretariat to set-up and prepare for these meetings well in advance of the meeting time. Additional delegation rooms are noted as beneficial but not essential.

Catering and Hospitality

Several comments raised the lack of social functions and associated loss of opportunity for information exchange / co-operative spirit. Adding social functions / tours would incur significant extra costs for the host. The Draft Minimum Meeting Model Standard therefore includes these as beneficial, but not essential.

The quality of pastries / snacks provided in the coffee breaks and lack of healthier options was also raised. The selection provided was the basic package offered by the hotel and, therefore, will depend on each individual venue's package. An 'enhanced refreshment package at morning and afternoon breaks' has been included in the Draft Minimum Meeting Model Standard to address this where possible.

It was noted that the hotel room service lunches were not appropriate for working lunches (for example, during the lunchtime Heads of Delegation meeting). The Draft Minimum Meeting Model Standard notes that the hotel should be able to provide lunches in meeting rooms that are appropriate for working lunches.

AV and Internet Provision

The reduced AV package worked well, with delegates viewing the main screen or using their laptops to access the platform if required. While there were difficulties with the internet in the main meeting room, this was an issue with the individual hotel and a substantial refund has been negotiated in respect of this (as mentioned above).

Another area identified for potential savings was the provision of secure Wi-Fi for NASCO delegates. The Secretariat is investigating this matter and liaising with other RFMOs on their internet provision.

Recommendation

The Secretariat has developed a 'Draft Minimum Meeting Model Standard for NASCO Annual Meetings' document (Annex 1).

- The Secretariat recommends that Heads of Delegations adopt these criteria as the baseline for NASCO Annual Meetings from 2028 onwards, recognising that arrangements are already underway for the 2027 Annual Meeting in Norway.

Annex 1

Draft Minimum Meeting Model Standard for NASCO Annual Meetings

This baseline meeting model standard is intended as an outline of the minimum requirements for NASCO Annual Meetings. A document containing more detailed information and up-to-date technical requirements will be provided to Parties / jurisdictions interested in hosting a NASCO Annual Meeting.

Meeting Room Space

- An office suitable for the Secretariat to work in (and associated IT / internet requirements);
- A main meeting room for all Board, FAC, Council and Commission meetings;
- Two delegation rooms; and
- A small, dedicated breakout room large enough for 10 people to host Heads of Delegation Meetings. This room will only be required for the scheduled Heads of Delegation meetings, plus set-up and break-down times.

Catering

- A basic refreshment package e.g. morning and afternoon teas and coffees; and
- The conference venue should be able to provide working lunches in delegation rooms, payable by individual delegates.

AV

Main Room

- One large screen to be visible around the room, two comfort monitors at the top-table, microphones, suitable speakers, cameras which can show all areas of the room and faces at the main table and power connections for all delegates;
- An interactive, rather than streamed platform for the hybrid element of the meeting; and
- Dedicated internet provision for hosting the hybrid platform.

Delegation Rooms

- Screen and HDMI connector in each room.

Delegates' Internet

- A dedicated, secure Wi-Fi internet connection available to delegates throughout the conference facilities and hotel; and
- Rapid internet support for the Secretariat Office, hybrid platform and delegates' network.

Additional Beneficial but Not Essential Requirements

- A separate meeting space to fit up to 100 people theatre style for hosting Special Sessions (and associated AV requirements);

- Additional break-out rooms;
- An enhanced refreshment package at morning and afternoon breaks; and
- A social function (e.g. reception or dinner) or post-NASCO tour (all of which could be self-funded).