

Convention for the Conservation of Salmon in the North Atlantic Ocean (Basic Instrument for the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization – NASCO)

Basic Instrument

Convention for the Conservation of Salmon in the North Atlantic Ocean (TIAS 10789), 1982

Implementing Legislation

Atlantic Salmon Convention Act of 1982 (16 U.S.C. 3601)

Members

Canada, Denmark (in respect of the Faeroe Islands and Greenland), the European Commission or EC, Norway, the United States, and the Russian Federation

(Note: Iceland left the organization effective December 31, 2009, due to financial considerations but may re-accede in the future.)

Commission Headquarters

North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization
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Budget

The Convention provides that 30 percent of the Organization's budget will be borne equally by the Parties; 70 percent will be based on recent catches of salmon in intercepting fisheries. NASCO's 2013 budget totaled 675,320 British Pounds Sterling-- of which the U.S. contribution was 30,816 Pounds. The 2013 budget represents almost a 200,000 Pound decrease over the 2012 budget, which included various new budget outlays, including to cover the cost of the organization's external performance review and the costs associated with the retirement of the Secretary. To meet budget needs for 2012 without accepting a significant increase in contributions, NASCO decided to borrow against its Working Capital, Contractual Obligation, and International Atlantic Salmon Research Board funds with a view to reimbursing those funds as quickly as possible, and no later than 2016. NASCO has adopted forecast budgets through 2016 which project relatively modest budget increases to ensure reimbursement of those funds. In 2013, NASCO will select a new Secretary for the organization. The actual impact on the budget will depend on the individual selected.

U.S. Representation

A. Appointment Process:

The Atlantic Salmon Convention Act of 1982 provides that the United States shall be represented on the Council and Commissions by three U.S. Commissioners, appointed by and to serve at the pleasure of the President. Of the Commissioners, one must be an official of the U.S. Government and two must be individuals (not officials of the U.S. Government) who are knowledgeable or experienced in the conservation and management of salmon of U.S. origin. Under

certain circumstances, the Department of State is authorized to designate alternate Commissioners pending appointment of a regular Commissioner by the President.

U.S. Commissioners:

Federal Government Commissioner:

Daniel Morris (Alternate)
Deputy Regional Administrator
Northeast Regional Office
National Marine Fisheries Service, NOAA
Gloucester, MA 01930

Non-Federal Commissioners:

Patrick Keliher (Alternate)
Commissioner
Department of Marine Resources
Maine

Stephen Gephard (Alternate)
Department of Environmental Protection
Inland Fisheries Division
Connecticut

B. Advisory Structure:

The U.S. Section to NASCO was formally constituted to provide the U.S. Commissioners with advice, with particular reference to development of U.S. policies, positions, and negotiating tactics. Membership of the U.S. Section includes public and *ex officio* members. Public members are appointed by the Commissioners and serve for a term of 2 years with eligibility for an additional 2-year term. Public members are limited to 15 in number and must be persons knowledgeable or experienced in the conservation and management of salmon of U.S. origin.

Ex officio members include:

- (1) the Chair (or designee) of the New England Fishery Management Council;
- (2) a representative of the fishery agency of each of the States of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut;
- (3) the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and Space or her representative;
- (4) a representative of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Department of Commerce; and
- (5) a representative of the Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior.

In addition, the U.S. Commissioners established the U.S. Atlantic Salmon Assessment Committee, which is composed of staff from State and Federal fishery agencies. The work of this body focuses on assessing New England stocks of Atlantic salmon, proposing and evaluating research needs, and serving the U.S. Section to NASCO. Each year this body meets for an Assessment Meeting from which an assessment document is produced for the use of the U.S. Commissioners.

Description

A. Mission/Purpose:

The Convention applies to the salmon stocks that migrate beyond areas of fisheries jurisdiction of coastal states of the Atlantic Ocean north of 36 degrees N latitude throughout their migratory range. The purpose of NASCO is to promote (1) the acquisition, analysis, and dissemination of scientific information pertaining to salmon stocks in the North Atlantic Ocean and (2) the conservation, restoration, enhancement, and rational management of salmon stocks in the North Atlantic Ocean through international cooperation.

B. Organizational Structure:

NASCO consists of: (1) the Council; (2) three regional Commissions (North American Commission or NAC, West Greenland Commission or WGC, and North-East Atlantic Commission or NEAC); and (3) the Secretariat. The Council, which consists of representatives of all Contracting Parties: (1) provides a forum for the study, analysis, and exchange of information on salmon stocks subject to the Convention; (2) provides for consultation and cooperation concerning salmon stocks beyond Commission areas; (3) coordinates the activities of the Commissions; (4) establishes working arrangements with the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) and other fisheries and scientific organizations; (5) makes recommendations concerning scientific research; (6) supervises and coordinates the administrative, financial, and other internal affairs of the Organization; and (7) coordinates the Organization's external relations.

The three Commissions each have the following functions: (1) to provide for consultation and cooperation among their members; (2) to propose regulatory measures for intercepting salmon fisheries; and (3) to make recommendations to the Council concerning scientific research.

Canada and the United States are members of the NAC. Canada, the EU, the United States, and Denmark (in respect of Greenland), are members of the WGC. Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands), the EU, Norway, and the Russian Federation are members of the NEAC. In the case of the NAC, the EU may submit and vote on proposals for regulatory measures concerning salmon stocks originating in the territories of its Member States. Canada and the United States each have similar rights in the case of the NEAC.

C. Programs:

Scientific Advice: ICES provides scientific advice to NASCO. To facilitate the process of requesting scientific information, the NASCO Council established a Standing Scientific Committee (SSC) in 1992, composed of a scientist and a management representative from each of NASCO's three geographic commissions, to formulate requests for future scientific advice from ICES. The SSC is designed to ensure that questions to the scientific working groups are formed to reflect accurately the information desired by managers. Initial consideration of NASCO scientific questions and compilation of catch statistics and other information are undertaken by the Working Group on North Atlantic Salmon. The results of this work are reviewed and considered by the ICES Advisory Committee (ACOM) and formal scientific advice is issued in the ACOM report to NASCO in advance of each annual meeting.

Non-Contracting Party Fishing: At the 1992 meeting held in Washington, D.C., the Council approved a protocol to the NASCO Convention for signature by non-Contracting Parties to NASCO due to concerns about fishing for Atlantic salmon by non-Contracting Parties to the NASCO Convention. The protocol was designed to provide non-Contracting Parties with a legal instrument for the creation and enforcement of domestic legislation and regulations. It calls upon non-members to prohibit the fishing of Atlantic salmon stocks beyond the areas of fishing jurisdiction of coastal states and to take appropriate actions to enforce the provisions of the protocol. The NASCO Council also approved a resolution calling upon NASCO Parties to encourage non-Contracting Parties fishing for salmon on the high seas to comply with the protocol and to obtain and compile information on such fishing. The NASCO Secretariat was given the task of devising a mechanism by which Parties to the NASCO Convention may approach states in which vessels observed to be fishing on the high seas for Atlantic salmon are registered and of documenting and disseminating information on high seas fishing activities contrary to the protocol.

To date, no non-Contracting Parties have become bound by the protocol although certain non-Contracting Parties (i.e., Panama and Poland) have taken actions to address the problem of salmon harvesting vessels registered in their countries. There have been no sightings of non-Contracting Parties fishing for salmon since February 1994; however, there have been few surveillance flights conducted over the winter and spring periods preceding NASCO annual meetings. Past estimates of catch taken by non-member vessels fishing in international waters has been 25-100 metric tons (mt).

The Council considered but did not pursue a proposal to conduct a pilot project to assess the utility of radar satellite data for the detection of salmon fishing by non-Contracting Parties in international waters; however, NASCO agreed to continue to consider the usefulness of satellite surveillance systems in this regard. Toward that end, NASCO has discussed holding a follow-up meeting to its 1993 meeting in the future, which would include coast guard/fishery protection agencies. Among other things, this meeting would review the results of a study of Norwegian satellite surveillance systems. NASCO will also continue to liaise with the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization and the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC) with a view to obtaining relevant information on sightings.

Unreported Catch: The Council has expressed continuing concern over the years about the level of unreported catch and has taken steps to try to reduce it. In 2007, NASCO convened a Special Session at its Annual Meeting to provide an opportunity for exchange by the Parties on: methods used to estimate unreported catches; trends in estimates of unreported catches; the source of unreported catches; and the measures being taken to minimize them. A time series of reporting for estimates of unreported catch (1999 – 2006) was developed and made available to the parties (CNL(07)10). The data identify estimates that range from a low of 534 tons (2006) to a high of 1,445 tons (2000), and represents estimates of unreported catch between 27-38% of the reported confirmed catch. The reason for review and greater scrutiny of information relative to unreported catch is founded on a number of factors. Foremost, the lack of reporting and under-reporting of catch, as well as illegal fishing, threaten salmon conservation. In addition, management measures to restrict legal fisheries in response to declines in salmon stocks can be offset by non-documented fishing mortality, all of which can have adverse resource and socio-economic impacts.

In general, sources of unreported catch include illegal target fishing; by-catch in directed fisheries for other species in riverine, estuarine, and marine environments where it is illegal to retain salmon; and under-reporting in legal recreational and aboriginal fisheries. Unreported catches within the jurisdiction of many Parties may occur in localized fisheries that take place over broad geographic ranges with multiple rivers. All parties agreed that it is difficult to quantify unreported catches given that they result primarily from illegal fishing. Many Parties indicated that where legal salmon fisheries are allowed, surveys by, and local knowledge of, enforcement authorities have been used to quantify unreported catches. Also, local management groups and associations have often been approached to gather information. Additional methods for estimating unreported catch include analyses and comparison of catch statistics over multiple years and analyses of catch per unit of effort from different netting sites or stations. In some cases, catch statistics from local anglers have been compared to catch statistics from foreign anglers which appear to be more accurate.

While it is agreed that the precise size of unreported catch in the jurisdictions of respective Parties is difficult to ascertain, trends in the level of unreported catch and related violations across jurisdictions suggest a decline in the amount of unreported catch. In some jurisdictions declines appear to correspond with increases in successful prosecutions and the severity of penalties imposed. Also, there are instances where sources of unreported catch in some aboriginal fisheries are now included in reported catch due to recent negotiated agreements. In recent years, regulatory measures such as area closures, onboard or at site observers, tagging and documentation of catch, sale, transfer or disposal by fishery proprietors or operators, and logbooks for recreational angling have been implemented. Public outreach, education, and notices likely have also proved to be useful in reducing unreported catch. The Council agreed to revisit the matter of unreported catch in the near future, has encouraged the Parties to maintain and continue efforts to reduce and eliminate unreported catch, and has recommended that Parties include actions related to unreported catch in their Implementation Plans and focus area reports as part of the “Next Steps” process. In that regard, the Council has requested that statistics on reported and unreported catch estimates be provided at the lowest possible level (in river, estuarine, coastal) to assist in assessing progress in fisheries management. In addition, the Standing Scientific Committee has included a question to ICES seeking clarification of the levels of unreported catch in the West Greenland subsistence fishery since 2002.

Research Fishing: At its 1995 Annual Meeting, NASCO first considered conditions under which research fishing by Contracting Parties might be undertaken. While all agreed that harvesting salmon for scientific research purposes could provide valuable management information, some were concerned that such research fishing could be contrary to Article 2 of the NASCO Convention. Following the 1995 Annual Meeting, the Parties considered a resolution to establish such a procedure, but for various reasons, NASCO was not able to adopt the resolution as presented. At the 1996 Annual Meeting, the Parties considered revised resolutions on the topic and adopted a resolution setting forth a procedure to allow research fishing. The measure does not distinguish where such fishing occurs (i.e., within areas of national jurisdiction or on the high seas) and allows research fishing provided certain safeguards are observed. Since the adoption of the resolution, NASCO has approved research-fishing proposals from several of its members.

International Atlantic Salmon Research Board (IASRB): Due to concerns about marine survival of Atlantic salmon, the Council agreed at its 2000 meeting to set up a working group to develop ideas for a 5-year international cooperative research program to identify and explain the causes of increased marine mortality of Atlantic salmon and to consider ways to counteract this problem. The resultant IASRB was established in 2001 and has been meeting regularly to identify and coordinate needed research and consider funding sources. The United States provided US\$150,000 as start up funding. The IASRB receives advice from its Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) and maintains an inventory of research relating to salmon at sea. The inventory has been made available to ICES and others to assist in the identification of data deficiencies, monitoring needs and research requirements.

In 2005, the IASRB adopted the SALSEA (Salmon at Sea) Program to advance the coordination of needed Atlantic salmon research. It comprised three main areas of work: developing technologies, early migration and distribution, and migration at sea (the marine survey component). The 2008 IASRB research inventory included three significant new projects: SALSEA-Merge, SALSEA-North America, and SALSEA-West Greenland. SALSEA-Merge was launched in April 2008. This three-year public-private partnership included multi-year marine surveys conducted by Irish, Faroese, and Norwegian vessels. Under SALSEA-North America, a Canadian research vessel conducted sampling in the Labrador Sea. U.S. scientists participated in the Canadian survey and facilitated processing of samples obtained during the cruise. Related to SALSEA West Greenland, enhanced sampling programs in the West Greenland fishery from 2009 through 2011 have been undertaken. Much of the work related to this ambitious project was completed in 2011 and preliminary findings, including implications for management, were presented at an international salmon summit held in La Rochelle, France, in October 2011. Additional information can be found at www.salmonatsea.com.

Now that the survey work of SALSEA has been completed, the Parties are considering whether or not the IASRB is still needed. At the 2012 NASCO meeting, the Board agreed that it continued to have a role to play at least until it was reimbursed by the Council for the loan made in 2011. The Board also stated that it could have a more informed discussion on its future relevance after receiving the report from the SAG subgroup discussed above.

Precautionary Approach: In 1997, the Council agreed to establish a working group to consider how the precautionary approach might be applied to NASCO's work. Its first meeting was held in January 1998 and representatives of ICES and FAO were invited to attend. At its 1998 annual meeting, NASCO adopted an agreement on adoption of the precautionary approach, which was largely developed at the 1998 intersessional. The key provisions of the agreement were: (a) NASCO and its Contracting Parties agree to adopt and apply a precautionary approach; (b) NASCO and its Contracting Parties should apply the precautionary approach to the entire range of NASCO salmon conservation and management activities; and (c) the application of the precautionary approach should focus on (1) management of North Atlantic salmon fisheries, (2) the formulation of management advice and associated scientific research, and (3) introductions and transfers including aquaculture impacts and possible use of transgenic salmon. To further this work, NASCO adopted the Action Plan for the Application of the Precautionary Approach to Salmon Management at its 1999 meeting. The action plan provides a framework to further implement the precautionary approach in NASCO and establishes a standing committee to oversee this work. The action plan addresses such issues as: management of fisheries; socioeconomic issues; unreported catches; scientific advice and research requirements; stock rebuilding programs; introductions, transfers, aquaculture and transgenics; habitat issues; and bycatch. The agreement by NASCO to apply the precautionary approach to its work represents a significant milestone in cooperation by the Parties. The NASCO Parties recognized that ultimate development of the precautionary approach will take many years and will seriously challenge the resources of the organization and its members. Progress has been made on a number of fronts, however, including the development of a decision structure for use by the Council and Commissions as well as by relevant authorities of NASCO members in the management of single and mixed stock salmon fisheries; a plan of action for the application of the precautionary approach to the protection and restoration of Atlantic salmon habitat; revision and broadening of the Oslo Resolution, including incorporating into it all other NASCO measures addressing introductions, transfers, aquaculture and transgenics (i.e., the guidelines on transgenic salmon, the NAC protocols, and the NEAC resolution, and the guidelines on containment). In addition, guidelines on stocking were developed and appended. The new and improved resolution was dubbed the Williamsburg Resolution. In addition, progress has been made in the area of socioeconomics through the adoption of guidelines for incorporating social and economic factors in decisions under the precautionary approach and additional work is being undertaken in this regard.

Liaison Group and Aquaculture issues: NASCO has recognized the need to involve the salmon farming industry in efforts to protect the wild stocks through improved salmon farming management. Toward that end, NASCO established a Wild and Farmed Salmon Liaison Group with the International Salmon Farmer's Association (ISFA) to effect closer cooperation with the salmon farming industry. This group has met several times since its inception and shared information on a variety of

topics, including area management initiatives, escape issues, controlling disease, etc. Until its 2007 meeting, NGOs were not invited to participate. In considering the results of the 2007 Liaison group meeting and a discussion document presented by industry, the Council decided that a Joint Technical Task Force should be established to consider matters further. Membership would be from the Secretariat and two or three nominated expert participants from NASCO and ISFA. The Terms of Reference for this Group were as follows: taking account of the findings in the 2005 ICES/NASCO Bergen Symposium, the Joint ISFA/NASCO Trondheim Workshop and any other relevant scientific information regarding impacts from aquaculture on wild stocks; and identify and agree on a series of best practice recommendations to address the continuing impacts of salmon farming on wild stocks (e.g. escapes, interbreeding, sea lice infestations, disease transfers to and from the wild). The Task Force was intended to at least temporarily replace the NASCO/ISFA Liaison Group. In communicating this decision to ISFA, that organization responded that it was eager to continue the relationship with NASCO and preferred to maintain the Liaison Group. The Council determined that it was not ready to reconvene the Liaison Group and proposed proceeding with the Task Force.

The Task Force met in Boston in March 2009 and reviewed national and international initiatives on best practice guidance and measures. It was the view of the Task Force that the Williamsburg Resolution remains valid but it needs to be strengthened in its interpretation and application, particularly in terms of defined goals and assessment of outcomes. The Task Force developed 'Guidance on Best Management Practices to address impacts of sea lice and escaped farmed salmon on wild salmon stocks.' The Guidance includes an international goal for both sea lice and escaped salmon, best management practices to help achieve those goals, reporting to track progress towards that goal, and identification of factors facilitating implementation. The Task Force recommended that NASCO include reference to the Best Management Practice matrix in the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the upcoming review group and ask that Parties report on progress toward achievement of the international goal. Given the proposed timeline for the preparation and review of the focus area reports (FARs) on Aquaculture, Introductions and Transfers and Transgenics, the Task Force agreed that it would be useful if its recommendations on best practice could be finalized in the autumn so that they could be taken into account by the jurisdictions in developing their FARs and be available to the Review that will review the FARs. The Task Force agreed that it would be useful to develop an explanation of some of the terminology used in the Guidance document and that it might also be helpful to develop a Decision tree to assist jurisdictions in applying the guidance. Finally, the Task Force urged NASCO and its jurisdictions to explore, in collaboration with industry, opportunities for cooperative scientific work in support of the goals.

The Liaison Group met immediately after the Task Force meeting and ISFA accepted the interim report of the Task Force. At its 2009 annual meeting, the Council supported the continued work of the Task Force and also its recommendation that the TORs for the upcoming FAR incorporate the Guidelines on Best Management Practice developed by the Task Force. The Liaison Group met again in Boston in March 2011 to reviewed the final report from the Aquaculture FAR group, consider reporting arrangements on the BMP guidance, and discuss potential future courses of action for the Liaison Group. There is an ongoing debate concerning the extent of NASCO's role with respect to aquaculture, introductions and transfers, and transgenics issues. Further, ISFA expressed interest in finding a way to participate in the work of NASCO during its annual meeting each year. Currently, this is only possible when ISFA held the Chair of the Liaison Group.

In considering the issues raised during the Liaison Group meeting, the Council agreed that the Liaison Group would not need to meet before the 2012 NASCO Annual Meeting and also agreed that the Constitution of the Liaison Group should be changed to allow for election of both a Chairman and a Vice Chairman as this would allow ISFA to engage NASCO through its role as either Chair or Vice Chair of the Liaison Group. The Council also decided that the question concerning the NASCO's involvement in aquaculture and related activities should be reviewed in light of the results of the Next Steps review process and the findings of the expert panel conducting NASCO's independent performance review.

During the intersessional meeting of the Parties, held in London in February 2013, the role of NASCO with regard to aquaculture and the future of the Liaison Group were discussed. The Parties concluded that aquaculture would remain a focus area for NASCO in terms of concerns over impacts on wild Atlantic salmon and progress toward the containment and sea lice goals would be tracked as implementation plans and annual reports are submitted. The Parties recognized that, in general, NASCO has established international goals and some guidance on measures that may reduce or avoid adverse impacts to wild stocks from aquaculture activities, but it is the responsibility of the Parties to identify and implement appropriate measures to meet the performance standards. This determination was not inconsistent with the recommendations of the external performance review panel although it did not go as far as that recommendation (i.e., the Parties did not agree to seek revision of its Convention to allow binding decisions to be taken in the area of aquaculture and related activities). With regard to the Liaison Group, the Parties concluded that, while there was not a need for a permanent body, there

remained the option to convene a joint *Ad Hoc* group if the need arose. The Parties also agreed that an item should be retained on the Council agenda to allow for an exchange of information between ISFA and NASCO on issues concerning impacts of aquaculture on wild salmon.

Next Steps for NASCO: On the occasion of its 20th anniversary, NASCO decided to undertake a review of the Organization (in essence, a performance review) in order to ensure that it was properly positioned to be able to address the current and future issues facing Atlantic salmon in the North Atlantic. Through an intensive working group process that included public scoping meetings, NASCO comprehensively reviewed its Convention, rules of procedure, decision making, structure, and operations. The Working Group developed a Strategic Approach that articulated the vision for NASCO, framed future activities of NASCO, and laid out a clear approach for moving forward in addressing challenges and implementing the recommendations. The Council endorsed the work of the Working Group, calling for speedy implementation of some recommendations and setting up processes to consider implementation aspects for the more complicated issues, including those surrounding improving implementation of and reporting on Contracting Party commitments. A Public Relations Working Group was created to develop a strategy to raise the profile of the Organization and generally to improve public relations and outreach. A Task Force met intersessionally to develop improved reporting procedures to enhance compliance and accountability with NASCO agreements. Developing improvements to the transparency and inclusiveness of the organization, including by considering modification of the rules governing observers at NASCO meetings, was also a key recommendation. Advancements in all the areas identified for improvement have been made. Relevant information on the task force recommendations follows:

Transparency: Regarding transparency, revisions to NASCO's rules of procedures concerning NGOs were developed which increased their level of involvement, including allowing them to take the floor more frequently during NASCO meetings and participate in working groups. This move helped resolve a longstanding difference between NASCO and at least two North American NGOs whose observer status in the organization had been suspended. In addition, more debate on issues occurs in plenary rather than in Heads of Delegation meetings so that the rationale for decisions is more clearly understood.

Accountability/Implementation Plans: During its 2005 annual meeting, NASCO agreed that one way to improve implementation, commitment, and accountability was to have each Party produce an Implementation Plan (IP) and report annually on progress in achieving the objectives contained therein. The Next Steps Task Force met intersessionally before the 2006 Annual meeting developed guidelines to assist the Parties in preparing the IPs and to provide a proposed process and schedule for review and finalization of IPs, as well as for focus area reports under the IPs. The Council refined this work at the 2006 annual meeting. At the 2007 NASCO meeting, the Council held an open "Special Session" on the Report of the *Ad Hoc* Review Group appointed in 2006 to evaluate the IPs. At this stage, the review focused on the structure of the plans and how well they conformed with the guidelines for development of the plans not the adequacy of their substantive content. The plans were submitted or resubmitted for final review by November 1, 2007.

The second phase of review of the Next Steps Process was to develop "focus area reports" or FARs for review and assessment in key Atlantic salmon management areas. The first focus area report was on the fisheries management aspect of the IP. An *Ad Hoc* Review Group reviewed the focus area reports and questions based on the review were developed for each Party. Its interim report was presented at the 2008 Annual Meeting of NASCO. The Council agreed that in addition to its remaining task of identifying the additional actions required to achieve NASCO's objectives, the Group should be asked to identify common challenges in managing salmon fisheries and approaches to addressing them and to compile information on best practice. The final report of the Fisheries Management Focus Area Review Group was presented during the special session. The Group recommended that the Council formally adopt the draft guidance on best practice as a way of providing clarification for the guidelines, agreements and definitions relating to fishery management or revisit these agreements and guidelines.

There was significant discussion during the special session in terms of characterization of the best practice document. Some raised a specific concern that a best practice document could contain provisions for allowing fishing on stocks below their conservation limit. The continued threat of mixed stock fisheries was also raised, including those occurring in home waters. In light of the significant concerns raised by the Parties on the proposed Fisheries Best Management Practices, the document was revised and characterized as guidelines (NASCO Guidelines for the management of salmon fisheries). Despite the name change, the substance of the document remains similar to the original document and most felt it still achieved the goal of providing guidance for how Parties should be managing their fisheries. Others, however, felt that guidelines are less rigorous than a document of best management practice.

The second FAR, which was publicly considered in a 2009 special session, was on habitat protection and restoration. The Habitat Focus Area Review Group presented their draft report at the special session and summarized the process and results of their review. Similar to the previous review of implementation plans, Parties did not necessarily score high marks if they had pristine salmon habitat, but rather on the extent to which their Habitat FARs were consistent with the NASCO Habitat Plan of Action. The Habitat Review Group concluded their presentation by identifying next steps for their review including: compilation of best practice; development of an overview of challenges and approaches to address restoration, protection, and enhancement of salmon habitat; and completion of a final report by the end of the year. The final work of the review group was presented at the 2010 NASCO meeting. Guidelines for the Protection, Restoration, and Enhancement of Atlantic Salmon Habitat were adopted and are intended to assist Parties in the effective implementation of NASCO agreements and to aid future reviews of FARs in this subject area.

At the 2009 NASCO meeting, the parties finalized the terms of reference for the third FAR on aquaculture, introductions and transfers, and transgenics. The Council also agreed to establish a Task Force to develop best practice with regard to minimizing impacts of aquaculture on wild stocks. During the period between the 2009 and 2010 NASCO meeting, completed aquaculture FARs were evaluated by a review group. The report of that group was considered by the Liaison Group and then presented and discussed at a special session held during the 2010 annual meeting. During the 2010-11 intersessional period, the review group finalized its consideration of the FARs taking into consideration input from the special session, from industry and NGOs, and from the Parties. The findings were reported to NASCO at its 2011 meeting, having been previously considered by the Task Force and the Liaison Group. Although significant information was provided, no jurisdiction had met the goals of the BMP guidance of: (1) 100% of farms having effective sea lice management such that there is no increase in sea lice loads or lice-induced mortality for wild salmonids attributable to the farms; and (2) 100% of farmed fish are retained in all production facilities.

Public Relations Group: As part of the Next Steps process, the Council agreed in 2006 to establish a Public Relations Group to advise on implementation of public relations/outreach issues. Terms of reference were adopted. The Public Relations Group met in London in December 2006. The Group developed recommendations for a strategy to enhance NASCO's profile and increase publicity for its work, including development of an annual 'State of Salmon' report, undertake a major enhancement of the Organization's website, and potentially employ an Information Officer with good public relation skills. In order to carry out some of the tasks identified by the PR group, the Council decided to allocate 25,000 Pounds Sterling (approximately USD\$50,000) to upgrade and improve the website of NASCO and the IASRB, and produce possible formats for a "State of the Salmon" report. The State of the Salmon report was identified as an aspect of the communications strategy that is a critical element of enhancing public understanding. Such a report would be posted on the website and updated as necessary to provide accessible information to the public on the current health of salmon stocks in the North Atlantic. The Group recommended that in addition to the State of the Salmon report, other fact sheets should be accessible via the website to encourage greater transparency and information accessibility.

Moreover, there was general agreement that the organization should be developing a communications rather than a public relations strategy. In 2009, the Council received a report from a Public Relations Group, which met during the Annual Meeting. The Public Relations Group stressed the importance that Parties consider their commitment to improving public relations and communication given the significant effort that would be required to truly invest in the process. Related to this point, the Public Relations Group requested that if the Parties were committed to this process, a communications representative from each of the Parties would be necessary and the use of new communications media such as facebook, twitter, and flickr was suggested. During 2009 Council meeting, most of the recommendations of the Public Relations Work Group were agreed although no final decision was taken concerning the use of new communications media.

To date, good progress has been made in revamping the websites. A primary focus over the last year was to include information from NASCO's rivers database on the website, including maps. In support of that effort, members have provided relevant updates to the information in the database such that information on about 2500 rivers will be included. In addition, NASCO has updated and developed new pages containing relevant socio-economic information associated with wild Atlantic salmon.

Socio-Economic Working Group: For a number of years, NASCO has been considering the issue of how to effectively incorporate social and economic factors into salmon management—including what role NASCO should play in this regard—most recently as part of the Next Steps process. Part of the difficulty in advancing the issue has been in developing a shared understanding of the concept. Early efforts included the potential development of a bio-economic model, which has since been put on hold, and also to gather basic types of socio-economic data and information from NASCO Parties, such as the

number of salmon fishing licenses issued by jurisdiction, for inclusion on the NASCO website. A sub-group on socio-economics was formed to help progress the issue, including continuing development of the “State of the Salmon” report. In addition, NASCO adopted guidelines a few years ago to assist Parties in incorporating social and economic factors into salmon management. Implementation of these guidelines and reporting on how Parties consider and include social and economic factors into salmon management has been limited—no doubt in part because of a lack of a common understanding of the issue.

To facilitate greater understanding, the Sub-Group on socio-economics proposed that a Special Session be held to provide for a more detailed exchange of information on how jurisdictions are incorporating socio-economic factors into decisions relating to fisheries management, habitat protection, and aquaculture and related activities. The idea is to have a limited number of case studies presented that illustrate different concepts of how socio-economics are used in salmon management with a view to facilitating discussion. A valuable outcome would be a more common understanding of how socio-economics should be used in salmon management, including a better understanding of the purpose of the NASCO guidelines and a discussion of their usefulness. A discussion of the future role of NASCO with respect to the matter is also anticipated. NASCO agreed to convene a Special Session on the topic in 2014. The Sub-Group was asked to further develop the program for the session, including determining the presentations to be made.

Review of the “Next Steps” process: At the 2010 annual NASCO Meeting, the Council agreed to hold an intersessional meeting prior the 2011 annual meeting in order to review the status of implementation of the “Next Steps” process. The review group met in Boston in March 2011 and reviewed the status of implementation for each of the identified seven challenges. It was acknowledged that progress has been made in some challenge areas, other areas have only begun initial steps, and still others have not yet been addressed. Further, the group recognized that the progress made to-date has largely focused on process. Overall, however, the Group recognized that the process represented a significant step forward for NASCO in improving implementation of its goals and objectives and is intended to be an iterative process that would be refined on the basis of experience and information gained over time. In that regard, the Group considered the need to update the Strategic Plan and recommended that, to this end, additional feedback be sought during a Special Session of the 2011 Annual Meeting. The Group also suggested streamlining the next Implementation Plans so that details on activities and actions to be taken by each jurisdiction over a five-year period can be included. In addition, the Group stated that there should be a greater emphasis on monitoring and evaluation of activities and should clearly describe identifiable, measureable outcomes, and timescales. The Group also recommended that future FARs be structured around specific themes and that progress on Implementation Plans be addressed through the Annual Reports. Finally, the Group proposed convening a Working Group to develop a framework for future reporting and evaluation and that would report to the 2012 Annual Meeting. At the 2011 NASCO meeting, the Council endorsed these recommendations. The proposed working group met during the 2011-12 intersessional period to conduct its work. Its recommendations for a more improved reporting process that focused on outcomes were considered and adopted during the 2012 NASCO annual meeting. At the February 2013 intersessional meeting of the Parties, the Next Steps process was further considered and its original goals and objectives continued to be endorsed. The recommendations from the review of the Next Steps process were further discussed and included as part of an overall action plan for strengthening the organization. (See below for more information on the intersessional meeting of the Parties.)

Performance Review of the Work of NASCO: The EU made a proposal to the Council a few years ago that NASCO conduct an independent performance review similar to those being conducted by other Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs). Given that the proposal was made before the Next Steps process had completed a full implementation cycle, the Council agreed that the external performance review would be initiated in 2011 as that year would mark the end of the first full Next Steps cycle. It was also acknowledged that the internal process to critically review the Next Steps process would be underway and the results of that work could inform the expert panel.

As agreed, three independent experts were empanelled in 2011 to conduct an external performance review of the organization taking into account the results of the Next Steps process, the provisions of the Convention, and advancements in international fisheries management, including recent international instruments. The performance review report was completed in the spring 2012. At its June 2012 annual meeting, NASCO agreed to convene an intersessional meeting of the Parties to consider the panel’s recommendations in detail. The meeting also considered the results of the Next Steps review discussed above and any additional input from members and stakeholders. The overall purpose of the meeting was to discuss a future vision for the organization and consider ways to strengthen it.

At the meeting, the Parties reaffirmed that priority areas of focus to support the recovery of wild Atlantic salmon continue to be fisheries management, habitat, and aquaculture and related activities. Recommendations by the external performance review panel and some NGOs that NASCO amend its Convention, in particular to expand and enhance the organization's ability to take binding decisions, were discussed. Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) expressed support for broadening the scope of NASCO's binding authority with its primary interest relating to the management of home water fisheries. The majority of parties, however, felt that there were effective and less time consuming ways to address these matters. Concern was also expressed about the difficult and time-consuming nature of amending the Convention. As a result, a draft action plan was developed for consideration at the NASCO annual meeting in June that (1) identified progress made to date in priority and other areas of NASCO's work that need to be monitored and evaluated, (2) recommended new actions to be undertaken to improve the ability of the organization to meet its objectives, and (3) highlighted that fisheries management was a particular priority that required additional commitment by the parties, including exploring new ways to ensure fairness and balance between conservation actions taken by distant water fisheries and those taken in home water fisheries. The outcome of this meeting will be considered by the Council at its 2013 annual meeting in June.

Actions Taken by NASCO's Three Regional Commissions:

NAC Discussions/Actions: In 2011, four of the six geographic areas (U.S.A., Scotia-Fundy, Quebec, and Labrador) were below their CL and were therefore suffering reduced reproductive capacity. Two of the six geographic areas (Newfoundland and Gulf of St. Lawrence) were above their CL and were therefore at full reproductive capacity. Management advice in the form of catch options is only provided for the non-maturing 1SW and maturing 2SW components, as the maturing 1SW component is not fished outside of home waters. As there is less than 75% probability that the numbers of 2SW salmon returning to the six regions of North America will be above the management objectives (conservation limits for the four northern areas, rebuilding objectives for the two southern areas) simultaneously, there are no mixed-stock fisheries catch options on 1SW non-maturing and 2SW salmon in North America in 2012 to 2015. Where spawning requirements are being achieved, however, there are no biological reasons to restrict the harvest.

ICES noted that wild salmon populations are now critically low in extensive portions of North America and remnant populations require alternative conservation actions in addition to very restrictive fisheries regulation to maintain their genetic integrity and persistence and where necessary habitat restoration. Given that many stocks in the NAC area, particularly those originating in U.S. rivers, are in a critical state, little fishing is undertaken. The U.S. has not had a commercial fishery since 1948 and in more recent years, recreational fisheries have been eliminated. Canada has reduced its fisheries substantially over the years, including having eliminated its commercial fisheries several years ago. Currently, three groups in Canada exploited salmon: aboriginal peoples; residents fishing for food in Labrador, and recreational fishers.

Labrador Sampling: Sampling by Canada provided an update in the Labrador fishery has continued through 2011 and information on this activity was reported to ICES. Sampling activities were expected to continue in 2012-13.

Salmonid Introductions and Transfers: The United States and Canada have been working bilaterally to improve cooperation on the management of aquaculture operations—in particular with respect to containment of farmed fish and notification when escapes occur. In light of the significant domestic changes both countries have been undergoing with regard to the management of introductions and transfers, in 2008 it was determined that it would be timely and appropriate to revisit the status of the NAC protocols, the SWG, and the inventory databases. Ultimately, the NAC agreed sharing information is important, however, the level of detail included in the current NAC databases is unnecessary although both parties have an obligation to notify the other if any introduction or transfer is inconsistent with the NAC Protocols. While recognizing that there is no longer a need to populate and maintain an international database on introductions and transfers, the need to exchange information annually and more immediately on fish health and breaches of containment was identified. Regarding introductions and transfers, it was determined that information should be provided on any transfers made into the Commission area (including from the west to the east coast and from Europe to North America) on an annual basis. These needs are in addition to the commitment already contained in the MOU between the United States and Canada. It was agreed that the changes to reporting should be reflected in the Williamsburg Resolution and that the U.S. and Canada would liaise as needed to address any remaining issues. Each year, both countries are to present relevant information in writing to the NAC.

The St Pierre and Miquelon Salmon Fishery: In recent years, the North American Commission and the Council have been concerned about catches of salmon at St. Pierre and Miquelon (SPM) which have been increasing at a time when there are serious worries about the abundance of North American stocks and when strict harvest restrictions have been introduced throughout the North Atlantic. The cooperation shown by France (in respect of SPM) to NASCO over the years has been

inconsistent, and the organization has tried a wide variety of means to enhance this cooperation. In 2007, the Council agreed to try a new approach in this regard; namely, to invite France (in respect of SPM) to become a Party to the NASCO Convention. The NASCO President wrote to the Director for Fishing and Agriculture on 18 January 2008 and again on 9 April 2008. France (in respect of the SPM) was also invited to attend the 25th Annual Meeting as an observer. France (in respect of the SPM) attended the meeting and provided a report on the management of the fishery, the catches, and information from the sampling program. The representative from France (in respect of the SPM) stated that discussions were ongoing regarding the invitation to join NASCO. In 2009, France (in respect of SPM) again attended NASCO as an observer and reported that France has decided against joining the organization. NASCO decided to send a strong letter to France expressing disappointment that France (in respect of SPM) does not intend to accede to the NASCO Convention and stressing the reasons why it is important for France (in respect of SPM) to be at the NASCO table; highlighting concern about increased catch levels in 2008; welcoming biometric sampling by that country; underscoring the urgent need for additional sampling, including genetics work, particularly in light of the ongoing SALSEA research program; and requesting that information related to the fishery at SPM be provided to ICES in time for incorporation into the ICES ACOM report. The Commission also welcomed any help NGO's could offer in encouraging France (in respect of SPM) to improve cooperation with NASCO. The NGO Representative underscored their interest in assisting in this matter. France has continued to attend the NASCO annual meeting in recent years and to provide some fishery data. Still, reported harvests in recent years have been generally between 3 and 4 t with 2011 being just below 4 t. Sampling of the catch in SPM to conduct genetic studies has occurred only once, and there are concerns about the methods being used. Efforts are underway to improve cooperation in this area.

WGC Discussions/Actions: NASCO has adopted the following objectives for management advice for the West Greenland fishery, which require at least a 75% probability of success:

- Meeting the CLs simultaneous in the four northern regions of North America: Labrador, Newfoundland, Quebec and Gulf of St. Lawrence;
- Achieve an increase (>10% or >25%) in returns relative to previous years for the two southern regions of North America: Scotia-Fundy and US;
- Meeting the CL for the Southern NEAC MSW complex.

If these objectives are not met, no fishery should be allowed. (Note that the management objectives for the U.S. and Scotia-Fundy regions are to be reviewed by the NAC and WGC in 2013.) As in previous years, ICES indicated in its 2012 report that it considered the West Greenland stock complex to be below conservation limits (CLs) and, thus, suffering reduced reproductive capacity. In European and North American areas, the overall status of stocks contributing to the West Greenland fishery is among the lowest recorded; the abundance of salmon within the West Greenland area is thought to be extremely low compared with historical levels. In North America, 2SW spawner estimates for the six geographic areas indicated that four areas were below their CL in 2011 and are suffering reduced reproductive capacity. Three of the four Northeast Atlantic stock complexes prior to the commencement of distant water fisheries were considered to be at full reproductive capacity. However, at a country level, stock status from several jurisdictions is below CL and further, within the countries there are many river stocks which are not meeting CLs. ICES advised that there are no mixed-stock fisheries catch options at West Greenland in 2012, 2013, and 2014. In the absence of fishing mortality there is only a 6% to 8% chance of simultaneously meeting or exceeding the management objectives of the seven management units in 2012 to 2014.

ICES developed a Framework of Indicators (FWI) for the West Greenland fishery in 2007, which was accepted by NASCO that same year. The FWI includes 32 indicator variables that can be used to determine if there has been a significant change in the previously provided multi-annual catch advice. The FWI would be used in January of a given year. ICES would only conduct a full assessment of the mixed stock off West Greenland if the FWI indicated that a significant change had occurred. In the absence of a significant change in the intervening years, a full assessment would be conducted every three years. The FWI was first developed to support multi-year regulatory measures adopted for the period 2006-2008. The FWI and associated process have been working well within the WGC.

In 2012, the Commission adopted a multi-annual regulatory measure for the period 2012-2014 that was based on previous measures. The measure again provides for an internal use fishery at West Greenland. The fishery is estimated to be about 20 t, but there is concern about significant levels of unreported catch. The addition of new language in the measure concerning the need for improved monitoring and reporting could not be agreed. Continued application of the FWI was agreed, and it will be applied with respect to the current agreement in 2013. In addition, a collaborative "sampling agreement" was adopted

for the fishery similar to those of previous years to continue to monitor the stocks, including the percentage of U.S., Canadian, and EU stocks contributing to the fishery at West Greenland.

NEAC Discussions/Actions: The NEAC stock complex is made up of four individual components. ICES considers the Northern European 1SW and MSW and the Southern European MSW stock complexes to be at full reproductive capacity prior to the commencement of distant water fisheries with respect to their spawner escapement reserves. The Southern European 1SW is at risk of suffering reduced reproductive capacity prior to the commencement of distant water fisheries with respect to its spawner escapement reserve. In the absence of any fisheries in 2012 to 2015, there is less than 95% probability of meeting the CL (full reproductive capacity) in the two age groups of the southern NEAC stock complex. Therefore, in the absence of specific management objectives, ICES advises that there are no mixed-stock fisheries options on the NEAC complexes at Faroes in 2012 to 2015. In all years, there is 71% to 73% probability of meeting the CLs for the NEAC complexes simultaneously, in the absence of any mixed-stock fisheries. ICES advised that fishing should only take place on salmon from rivers where stocks have been shown to be at full reproductive capacity. Furthermore, because of the different status of individual stocks within stock complexes, mixed-stock fisheries present particular threats. The management of a fishery should ideally be based upon the individual status of all stocks exploited in the fishery.

In 2012, ICES also presented the finalized Framework of Indicators (FWI), which was intended to be used to support adoption of multi-annual regulatory measure by the NEAC. The FWI is to be used by NASCO to identify if any significant change may have occurred in the status of the stock which would call into question the previously provided multi-annual management advice. The FWI is similar to the framework used for the West Greenland fishery. The FWI will be applied at the beginning of 2013 for the first time.

There has been no commercial fishery at the Faroe Islands since 2000. A compensation payment was made during the years 1991-1999 and 2001-2008. In 2012, the Commission adopted, for the first time, a multi-year decision for the Faroe Islands fishery. This was made possible by the acceptance of the FWI provided by ICES. Similar to regulatory measures adopted in previous years (i.e., since 2001), the measure states that the Commission will not set a quota but that the Faroe Islands will manage any fishery on the basis of ICES advice. In adopting the measure, Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands) emphasized that no agreement had been reached on a sharing arrangement for allocating any available surplus between the Faroe Islands and the homewater countries. Such an arrangement would be needed to support the development of a regulatory measure when there is a harvestable surplus. In its most recent advice, ICES used the allocations proposed in 2011.

The NEAC has also been discussing the management of the Finnmark fishery. In particular, the EU and Russia have expressed serious concerns about a Norwegian fishery in the Finnmark region of Norway that intercepts salmon originating in Finland and Russia. The NEAC agreed to have an agenda item at the 2013 annual meeting to allow for a focus on the management of all mixed-stock fisheries.

Other Matters:

Additional information on the work of NASCO can be found on its website (www.nasco.int). The Council agreed to hold its 30th Annual Meeting in Drogheda, Ireland, from June 4-7, 2013.

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