

**Notes from the 28th NASCO Meeting
June 2011
Ilulissat, Greenland**

The North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation (NASCO) is an inter-Governmental organisation consisting of all countries within the northern hemisphere with populations of wild salmon - USA, Canada, Greenland, Iceland, Faroe Islands, Russia, Norway and EU. Its overall objective is the protection, conservation and restoration of wild Atlantic salmon stocks on an international scale, while its primary work is the setting of quotas for high seas fisheries at Greenland and the Faroe Islands. It also tackles such issues as aquaculture, fisheries management and habitat restoration.

Greenland Fishermen's Demonstration

Greenlandic fishermen held a demonstration outside the hotel hosting the 28th NASCO meeting (4th - 6th June) in Ilulissat, West Greenland.

The fishermen, members of KNAPK (Greenland's organisation of fishermen and hunters), demanded a new commercial quota to catch and sell salmon abroad in order to take advantage of what they consider to be a return to abundance of fish off the West Greenland coast, and thus the rising global prices for wild salmon which they cannot attain in their own subsistence markets.

NASCO has set a subsistence quota for Greenland salmon in recent years, tightly regulating this fishery which catches mixed stocks of fish mainly from the USA and Canada, but also significant numbers of European salmon, almost all of which are destined to be larger, multi sea winter fish. Eighty per cent of these are likely to be egg bearing females, according to the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES).

ICES Advice

This has remained constant since 2000; as pre fishery abundance of Atlantic salmon has slumped from historic levels of 4 million to presently around 1 million fish, there should be no commercial exploitation of stocks. ICES also states that mixed stock fisheries present particular problems for salmon management, in that they exploit fish from more than one river system, therefore making individual stock management impossible.

To confound the problem, there was also some discussion during the main meeting as to the protocols which might be adopted to reopen the other large high seas mixed stock fishery off the Faroe Islands. The Faroese retain the right to fish for salmon, but have not exercised that right since 2000. Any reopening of the fishery could prove disastrous for European stocks of salmon, particularly runs of grilse.

One suggestion, for instance, was that each jurisdiction should be satisfied that at least 75% of its rivers were meeting their Conservation Limits before the fishery might be reopened. After some while, the NGOs intervened and suggested that the whole point of NASCO was to finish all mixed stock fisheries, and that this reopening

would be a major regressive step that would invite ridicule externally. In the light of the ICES report, the emphasis should be on pushing the abundance graph back up rather than discussing when damaging fisheries could be reopened.

Fortunately, ICES convinced parties that they should continue reporting in the usual way, and that there was no probability in the foreseeable future of any other recommendation than 'no exploitation'. Indeed, ICES was somewhat frustrated at always having to give the same fishery advice each year.

The final irritation was the EU's insistence on proclaiming that ICES' figures showed the majority of salmon were now caught in rivers, making it clear that NGO's angling interests were coming to the fore. We were able to bring in the idea that catch and release played a major role in salmon conservation while protecting socio economic benefits, but even here, the EU questioned the survival rates of released fish!

S&TA CEO, Paul Knight, who chaired the NGOs at NASCO this year, stated, 'this just shows how home countries - specifically Norway, Scotland and England - must regulate their own coastal mixed stock fisheries far more robustly than at present, with a committed target of complete closure. It sends out completely the wrong signals to Greenland and the Faroese that, while they are being asked to sacrifice their salmon fishing in the interests of conserving and restoring stocks, those same fish that were saved on their feeding grounds are being heavily exploited as they return to their natal rivers. It is unfair to Greenlandic and Faroese fishermen, and hypocritical of home water salmon managers sitting at the NASCO table.'

Aquaculture

The major issues to come from the Review of Parties' aquaculture policies and performance included:

- There were few action plans for effective containment of fish within cages
- There was little consideration shown for the health of wild salmonids
- There was little evidence of genuine actions (over words/plans) towards sustainability
- There was a lack of scientific evidence, or an appetite to seek it, at the farm scale

Norway considers that management of aquaculture should be for individual parties to decide locally, rather than remaining a central NASCO issue, and wants the Aquaculture Review process to be every 5 years, and then only as a report back to Council, and certainly not involving any assessment process. The NGOs gave a robust counter to this approach, reiterating that NASCO requires more, not less, teeth in holding parties to account for policies which impact wild salmonids.

And Norway's attitude was especially bizarre, when the two most concerning potential impacts recently identified in the country were lice and escapees emanating from salmon farms.