

Opening Statement made by the President of NASCO

Mr Deputy Assistant Secretary Brennan:

A cháirde uilligh, fáilte roibh go leir chuig on fiche is a ceathar crinniu don Aontas an Atlantaigh Thuaidh um Chaomhnu an Bhradain. Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to NASCO's Twenty-Fourth Annual Meeting here in this beautiful coastal area of Bar Harbor, Maine.

This is the second time NASCO has held its Annual Meeting in the United States and, as always, we are close to the wild salmon. In the past the great rivers of Maine supported an abundance of wild salmon stocks and major commercial and recreational fisheries, but over the past century stocks have declined to such an extent that in 2001 many of the stocks in this area were declared an endangered species and major restoration and conservation initiatives were put in place. This impressive work continues tirelessly to this day on major salmon rivers such as the Penobscot and the Kennebec. If you get the opportunity I would encourage you to visit the Acadia National Park, which surrounds Bar Harbor, and symbolises the unique natural history of this area, a familiar blend of marine, freshwater and terrestrial ecosystems so typical of the habitat favoured by the Atlantic salmon throughout its range.

For NASCO, the past year has yet again proven exceptionally busy and challenging but our small but highly efficient Secretariat have continued to do an outstanding job and we thank them most sincerely for their hard work and dedication.

For Malcolm and I, the past twelve months have largely centred on rolling out key aspects of the SALSEA programme. Through the good offices of our partners, Brakeleys, both Malcolm and I were retrained to ensure we were fit for purpose in the world of promotion and once we were considered to have achieved a modicum of skill in this area we were set loose on a carefully targeted set of potential SALSEA sponsors throughout Europe and North America. In parallel, partners in Europe, the US and Canada were busy profiling the programme and the issues relating to marine survival of salmon stocks. In this regard, I should like to particularly thank the International Atlantic Salmon Research Board, the SALSEA Steering Committee, the Atlantic Salmon Federation and Bud Bird, Canada's Mr SALSEA, for their advocacy role in North America, and both the Conservatoire National du Saumon Sauvage and the Atlantic Salmon Trust for their invaluable support. All of this combined effort is, at long last, bearing fruit and I look forward to briefing you on progress with the SALSEA programme during the Special Session on Thursday.

During this our Twenty-Fourth Annual Meeting, we will continue with the "Next Steps for NASCO" process and review the format of the Parties' Implementation Plans. I have been very impressed with the effort invested by all concerned in providing such detailed summaries of ongoing and planned conservation programmes and I thank you for your efforts. I should also like to thank the *Ad Hoc* Group, who meticulously reviewed the various plans for us. Their report has laid the basis for a very interesting debate during this afternoon's Special Session.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have before us an extensive and challenging agenda and three very full days of intensive discussion and debate. This year's NASCO Annual Meeting represents the largest attendance ever assembled, and I trust you will all have the opportunity to contribute to the various debates throughout the three days of the meeting, and that you will leave at the end of this week with a firm belief that the conservation of the wild Atlantic salmon is in good hands and that there is serious intent to address in a timely fashion, on behalf of generations to come, the many major conservation issues facing the wild Atlantic salmon.