

Opening Statement made by Canada

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates, Observers, Ladies and Gentlemen:

First, I would like to thank the Spanish authorities and the Secretariat for bringing the 25th annual meeting of NASCO to this beautiful city of Gijon, allowing us to enjoy once again the rich culture of Asturias. And of course we find ourselves near another important Spanish salmon river, the Piles.

Mr. President, despite numerous management actions at various levels there is still little evidence of success – salmon returns remain extremely low. In fact, Canada experienced a major setback in 2007: the catch of Atlantic salmon was 112 tonnes. The returns of large salmon in 2007 remained unchanged from the recent ten years and are the third lowest on record. Returns of small salmon declined sharply (-17%) from 2006 and this is attributed to reduced marine survival. In 2007, conservation limits were met in 36% of the 64 assessed rivers, down from 54% just a few years before. Returns have continued to decline in the southern areas and many populations are threatened with extirpation. In short, the overall situation remains a major concern.

Canada of course is not the only country around this table experiencing bleak results on salmon returns and not fully understanding why. In this context it was encouraging to see the reports of the Irish Marine Institute's research vessel RV *Celtic Explorer* sailing May 16th as a first segment of the scientific mission to investigate the migration and distribution of salmon in the Northeast Atlantic. Norwegian and Faroese vessels will also be involved later.

Mr. President, as we all know, the work of the International Atlantic Salmon Research Board and SALSEA are important. Once again, Canada was able to participate in various SALSEA projects relating to salmon mortality such as tracking, tagging, and sampling. To further Canada's commitment to research on understanding mortality at sea, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Canada announced a contribution of Can\$800,000 in-kind to a SALSEA program for a 23-day marine survey. A research vessel will be engaged in a marine survey this August. I should note the CCGS *Wilfred Templeman*, is named after a director of research that undertook the first Canadian program in 1965 to catch salmon at sea. This is part of a three-step approach that will look at salmon life history monitoring, tracking salmon migrations, and marine capture surveys to sample the upper column pelagic ecosystem during the early post-smolt phase of Atlantic salmon. Government is also being assisted on some of these endeavours by the Atlantic Salmon Federation with its sonic tracking project. In the future we expect involvement of our First Nations and Aboriginal groups in complementary ventures.

I am also pleased to inform you that Canada will be overhauling its *Fisheries Act*. It is the key authority for managing all fish in Canada and protecting fish habitat. While this legal authority has worked well for several decades it is in need of some changes to address emerging challenges of a modern era. The new Act, once it is approved, contains strong commitments to the precautionary approach to conserve aquatic resources and to ensure a science-based ecosystem approach to fisheries management.

Other initiatives underway in Canada include the development of a Wild Atlantic Salmon Conservation Policy. This will guide governments and stakeholders on initiatives to conserve wild Atlantic salmon. Another initiative is a \$30 million dollar investment by the federal government, the Atlantic Salmon Endowment Fund, which will be administered by the Atlantic Salmon Conservation Foundation. The income earned on the investment will be used to fund projects that contribute to healthy wild Atlantic salmon and their habitat.

This brings me to the Next Steps Process. I believe that the work that was done to complete the Implementation Plans proved to be a successful endeavour. In Canada, the plan is now seen and used as a reference document. With the focus area report now being reviewed, we hope the final version will become another useful document. Mr. President, Parties have put significant effort into developing these documents but it is turning out to be a most valuable initiative that helps us meet our obligations towards UNGA Resolution 61/105.

In closing, Mr. President, we are looking forward to a very productive week of work and discussions with our NASCO partners.

Thank you

***Opening Statement made by Denmark
(in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland)***

Mr President, Distinguished Delegates and Observers:

The Faroe Islands and Greenland are pleased to participate in the 25th Annual Meeting of NASCO, which has brought us here to the beautiful location of Gijón in Asturias in Spain.

I would like to emphasize that the objective of the NASCO Convention is to promote rational management of salmon stocks in the North Atlantic through international co-operation. In essence this provides equal access and exploitation rights to host nations as well as to river nations.

The commercial salmon fishery at sea was once very important to Greenland and to the Faroe Islands. It was imperative for a particular part of our fishing fleet.

Although the salmon still migrate to and feed in our waters, today no commercial fishing takes place. The Faroe Islands and Greenland have agreed to temporarily refrain from commercial exploitation of the salmon stocks in our fisheries zones in order to contribute to the rebuilding of the salmon stocks. We have acted responsibly to the scientific advice for years. But we continue to maintain our full rights to harvest salmon at sea in Faroese and Greenlandic waters in a responsible manner while temporarily refraining from exercising our rights in the interests of salmon conservation.

The decisions to refrain from fishing are taken based on the conclusions reached by ICES on the status of the salmon stocks. Likewise we expect the home water Parties to take into account the advice from ICES in their management of the salmon fishery.

In view of our continuing restraint, however, we would urge all river states to adopt policies that are fully supportive of our efforts to rebuild the salmon stocks, which depend on the feeding grounds in our waters. Unfortunately some do not. A considerable part of the salmon catches are taken in mixed stock fisheries in coastal areas. This information has been truly documented in the ICES reports for years.

This reveals, that so-called ‘interception fisheries’, for which both the Faroe Islands and Greenland have received so much blame ever since the inception of NASCO, are still conducted in other parts of the NASCO Convention Area.

With this irresponsible approach some Contracting Parties undermine the decisions taken by the Faroe Islands and Greenland to refrain from commercial salmon fishing.

Consequently the Faroe Islands and Greenland are keeping an eye on what is going on elsewhere in the NASCO area as we evaluate the fairness in refraining from fishing within our own fisheries jurisdiction.

We therefore welcome the information reported to NASCO in the review processes. With this information we are able to assess how Contracting Parties accomplish their obligations in

respect of the Convention, and to assess the balance in management measures in salmon fisheries in the North Atlantic.

This Annual Meeting marks an important step in the scientific co-operation to clarify the mystery of the salmon at sea. I am here referring to the SALSEA-Merge project. We would like to thank everybody involved and the funding organisations. In this respect I am very pleased with the support from the Total Foundation, which will be used to support the Faroese research cruises.

The Faroe Islands and Greenland look forward to working with the other Contracting Parties during the 25th Annual Meeting of NASCO.

Thank you.

Opening Statement made by the European Union

Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of the European Union and particularly our hosts, the Government of Spain, I would like to welcome you to Gijón for this Twenty-Fifth Annual Meeting of NASCO. I would like to thank our hosts for the excellent arrangements made for our meeting.

It is of concern to the European Union that the catch of wild Atlantic salmon in the North Atlantic in 2007 of 1500 tonnes was the lowest in the time series, was 20% lower than in 2006 and almost 90% lower than the peak catch of 12,500 tonnes in 1973. This reduction in catches reflects declining abundance and the European Union therefore welcomes the launch by the International Atlantic Salmon Research Board of the ambitious and innovative SALSEA Programme. The European Commission is delighted to be associated with this Programme and through the Seventh Research Framework Programme is funding a major element of it, the SALSEA-Merge Project, to the tune of Euro 3.5million out of a total project cost of Euro 5.5million. The Commission is, therefore, the largest contributor to this important research in the North-East Atlantic which was launched in Killybegs, Ireland on 16 May when the Irish Research Vessel, Celtic Explorer, set out on the first of three research surveys to be conducted in both 2008 and 2009. These research cruises aim to increase our understanding of how Atlantic salmon use the ocean; where they go; how they use ocean currents and the ocean's food resources; and what factors influence their migration and distribution at sea.

The European Union also welcomes the Special Session to discuss the focus area reports on management of salmon fisheries developed under the Parties' and jurisdictions' Implementation Plans. We note that not all members have been in a position to provide these reports at the appropriate time but those concerned will provide more information during the Special Session.

We would also like to return to the issue of a Performance Review of NASCO which we proposed last year and which the Council agreed to revisit during this Twenty-Fifth Annual Meeting with a firm commitment, in our view, to undertake such a review. We would simply note at this time that there is an international obligation that has been taken by our governments at the United Nations that all Regional Fisheries Management Organizations, such as NASCO, should as a matter of urgency undertake performance reviews with outside expertise. We trust that the Council will agree here in Spain to proceed with such a review.

Mr President, in closing I would like again to thank our hosts and the Secretariat for the arrangements made for this meeting which we hope will be productive and build on the important work carried out by NASCO over the last quarter of a century. We wish all delegates an enjoyable stay in Gijón.

Thank you.

Opening Statement made by Iceland

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives us great pleasure to attend this annual meeting in the picturesque setting of Asturias, where the sun seems to shine in appropriate amounts but the rain also pours to provide lush vegetation and enough water in the rivers for migrating salmonids. We also thank our Spanish host for these fine facilities and for the chance to see the beautiful coast of Asturias.

Turning to our agenda we have some very important issues in front of us. We have the final review on the implementation plans and the first review and presentation of the focus area reports related to fisheries management. As we welcome the change in transparency and openness that coincides with these tasks, I would like to add a word of caution as these reports are getting highly diversified and technical, which may endanger their capacity to be informative for ourselves as well as the NGOs. We are also very happy about the progress with the SALSEA-merge program, which is a special credit to your leadership, Mr. President.

On January 1 2008 the Icelandic Ministries of Agriculture and Fisheries were merged into a single Ministerial unit, which has led to a number of reorganizational activities. The “Icelandic Agricultural Authority”, e.g., which has been responsible for the management of salmon fisheries has been transformed into a “Food and Veterinary Authority” through a merger of various food related management issues. Subsequently the management of salmon and trout fisheries has been transferred to a separate salmonid division within the “Directorate of Fisheries” as of July 1 of this year. This brings the management of all fish into a single management organization, although salmonids are handled within a separate management unit.

The Icelandic angling catch in 2007 was about 53,500 salmon, which is a 15% increase from the previous year. A substantial part of this angling catch (28%), however, comes from rivers, which maintain their angling through smolt releases such as the Rangá rivers. Catches from rivers with natural propagation were thus 6 % under the 30 year annual average. The low catches were partly due to an exceptionally dry salmon season in July and August, which interfered with salmon catches during peak migration periods due to delayed migration into tributaries from mainstem rivers. As experienced in recent years the catches of 2SW salmon were precariously low and anglers were strongly urged to release salmon in that size category.

Although salmon marine cage-culture is no longer practiced to any extent in Iceland, there has been an increase in the cage culture of marine species, mostly onward rearing of wild captured cod. Coinciding with the transfer of salmon management responsibilities to the Directorate of Fisheries a new “Fish Farming Act” has just been passed by the Icelandic Parliament, which places the responsibility for the management of farming of all salmonids as well as all marine species within the Directorate of Fisheries.

Once more ICES has warned us that Southern European MSW stocks should not be fished in mixed stock fisheries due to their poor status. This is more or less confirmed by the apparent decline in Icelandic MSW salmon and all NASCO Parties are sincerely urged to adhere closely to the advice of ICES with respect to this stock component.

Finally, Mr. President, I want to thank you and the NASCO Secretariat for the efficient

preparation of the meeting and our Spanish hosts for their excellent hospitality.

Opening statement made by Norway

Mr President, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great pleasure for the Norwegian delegation to attend this Twenty- Fifth Annual Meeting of NASCO, here in beautiful Asturias.

The wild salmon has historically been, and still is, important to Norwegian and Sami culture.

Social and cultural reasons and values seem in some cases to be more important for this fishery than economic reasons. Only a small proportion of the sea fishermen in Norway are likely to have an economic surplus of their activity.

However, incorporating socio-economic factors in fisheries management in a transparent and informed way, is still suffering from lack of relevant information. We are therefore very pleased with the efforts from the Socio-economics Working Group to develop a comprehensive overview of the values of salmon, and that such data can be incorporated in the State of Salmon report.

Spawning targets have recently been introduced in Norway as an approach to setting management targets as reference points for the fisheries. In 2007 spawning targets were set for 180 rivers representing about 90 % of the yearly salmon catches in Norwegian rivers

Last year, the salmon catch in Norway was one of the lowest recorded. The stock complex also consisted of a remarkably low proportion of 1SW-fish. This is considered to be a serious warning signal, which is reflected in the regulations for the salmon fishery in 2008.

Substantial reductions of the fishing season are adopted for mixed stock fisheries, and in rivers where management targets were not achieved. The main goals for fisheries regulations are to meet spawning targets in all salmon rivers consistently, and to contribute to the reduction of escaped farmed salmon in spawning stocks.

In Finnmark County less strict regulations for the sea fishery were introduced due to viewpoints expressed by the Sami Parliament concerning the special cultural and economic importance of salmon fisheries in the sea to Sami people.

We are very pleased with the follow-up on the next steps process in NASCO. We look forward to this year's focus area reports and Special Session on fisheries management, which will give an indication on the success of the process.

Finally I would like to express my gratitude to our hosts and the Secretariat for having prepared for this meeting.

Thank you!

Opening Statement made by the Russian Federation

Mr President, Distinguished Delegates, Observers, Ladies and Gentlemen

I have great pleasure in being here in Asturias heading the delegation of the Russian Federation at the 25th Annual Meeting of NASCO. It is not the first time that NASCO holds its meeting in Spain. And I take this opportunity now to thank the EU and the Spanish Government for hosting this meeting in this picturesque province, again next to the wild salmon community, an extensive community that spans the whole North Atlantic Ocean. I am very pleased by the splendid arrangements made for us in the City of Gijon!

In this opening statement, I would like to draw your attention to some of the main priorities for the Russian Federation in conservation and management of Atlantic salmon.

Atlantic salmon is a national treasure in Russia. The challenges we all face today in conservation of this species are significant. We fully realize that without international cooperation, without combined efforts in developing the approaches and strategy for future actions no nation could expect to be successful at home.

Atlantic salmon stocks in many rivers in Russia continue to please us with their healthy state. We link this to the Precautionary Approach applied in management of salmon fisheries over a number of years. The use of the Decision Structure developed by NASCO allowed us, in the first place, to optimize the schemes applied for managing the fisheries. The focus was moved from commercial fisheries to recreational fisheries, thereby increasing the benefits from exploitation of the wild Atlantic salmon stocks and reducing the fishing pressure on mixed stocks exploited by net fisheries in coastal waters.

The coastal fisheries are still a significant contributor to catches taken in the North-East Atlantic. It is, therefore, important that all relevant Parties take further restrictive measures for their homewater fisheries, particularly, for those intercepting salmon from neighbouring countries. The Russian Federation is addressing in earnest the situation with mixed stock fisheries in its coastal waters. It is phasing out fisheries in the White Sea, with allocated quotas having gone down from 95 t to 51 t over the last three years.

NASCO has now come to a very important point in its work. After having invested significant effort in the Next Steps process, which we, in fact, view as a part of the performance review of NASCO, the major test for us now is an objective evaluation through our Focus Area Reports of how successful we are in meeting the commitments published in our Implementation Plans and to what extent we are implementing the requirements of NASCO's agreements. This will be a difficult test, but this will also be a much welcomed process of learning from each other, exchanging information and experiences and, furthermore, filling the gaps in our knowledge and rectifying mistakes to better manage and conserve salmon at home.

In Russia we are continuing the restructuring of our fisheries management. Important work has already been done, in particular, a basic law "On fisheries and conservation of aquatic biological resources" was adopted a few years ago and new amendments and additions to it were introduced from 2008, including those relating to the management of salmon fisheries.

New territorial directorates of the Federal Agency for Fisheries were established in the regions with much of the Agency's power delegated to them to make the management more flexible and bring it closer to the users and resources. However, much still remains to be accomplished and, in the first place, in developing the byelaws for implementing the fundamental elements of the Law.

And lastly, I wish to thank most sincerely all those who contributed their hard work and dedication to make the SALSEA, with SALSEA-Merge launched last month, an operative programme, that, I am sure, will advance our understanding of salmon's life in the ocean and factors behind increased marine mortality. Though so far modest, our contribution to this end, we hope, will soon be complemented by studies of the timing and routes of post-smolt migration along the coast of the White Sea, in addition to studies of salmon by-catch in pelagic fisheries in the Norwegian Sea undertaken by Russia in previous years. I would also like to highlight the importance of public-private partnership in implementing the SALSEA Programme and projects aiming at improving our knowledge of such a unique species as Atlantic salmon, in general. In this light I use this opportunity to mention the agreement between the Atlantic Salmon Federation and Polar Research Institute (Murmansk, Russia) to cooperate in fundamental and applied scientific research, which will permit a better understanding and management of wild Atlantic salmon of the Ponoï River, and world-wide.

Mr. President, the delegation of the Russian Federation is looking forward to a very productive meeting and to working closely with you and all the Parties during this week. I am confident that this Annual Meeting will contribute further to the preservation of this unique species for the generations to come.

Thank you.

Opening Statement made by the United States of America

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates, Observers, Ladies and Gentlemen:

On behalf of the United States, I would like to thank the European Union and Spain for organizing this Twenty-Fifth Annual Meeting of NASCO in this very beautiful location.

Attention and concern for the future of Atlantic salmon in the United States has intensified over the past year. This year the U.S. Government contributed \$10 million to a collaborative effort to remove two main stem dams on the Penobscot River and create a natural bypass at a third dam. In addition, we are currently considering expanding the existing listing under the Endangered Species Act to include additional Atlantic salmon populations and are in the process of designating critical habitat to bring further attention to those habitats that are essential to the recovery of this species. Our approach to Atlantic salmon recovery is a comprehensive one with a goal of recovering the ecosystems – freshwater, estuarine and marine – upon which salmon depend.

The participation of the U.S. in NASCO is an important component of our comprehensive strategy for Atlantic salmon recovery. In facing the challenge of international conservation and management of Atlantic salmon, NASCO should be proud that it has proven to be not just an Organization that uses the best available scientific information, but one that seeks funding, partnerships and opportunities to collect and analyze data in order to address critical information needs.

I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for your enthusiasm and leadership that has moved SALSEA from a vision to a reality. The manner in which Parties and Jurisdictions have contributed to implement unprecedented research programs is impressive and an excellent example of the power of international collaboration. The investment the U.S. has made in juvenile assessments, smolt trapping and tracking and post smolt cruises will be complemented by SALSEA North America which holds promise of providing insight into the critical marine portion of the life cycle. The U.S. looks forward to further involvement and leadership in SALSEA West Greenland in order to obtain as much information as possible from the fish in the internal use fishery

In 2003 at the Twentieth Anniversary of the Organization, NASCO initiated a Performance Review of the Organization through the Next Steps Process. We are now five years into the process and have completed a comprehensive review of the fitness, efficiency and effectiveness of the Organization with active involvement of our NGO partners and the involvement of a wide range and variety of stakeholders. The review culminated in a suite of recommendations, some of which were implemented immediately and others are still underway. Parties and Jurisdictions have invested a great deal of time and energy to create Implementation Plans in order to increase transparency and accountability and we are undertaking our first Focus Area Review. After the next two Focus Area Reviews are completed, we will have finished the full implementation cycle and will be well positioned to re-assess the Next Steps process to see if our objectives have been achieved.

The United States looks forward to a productive and constructive meeting this week with

opportunities to learn from each other through the Focus Area Review Special Session and to plan for the next Focus Area Review. NASCO continues to be a leader in international fisheries management, demonstrating leadership in its commitment to tangible implementation of the Precautionary Approach, initiative in undertaking a critical review and implementing change, increased transparency and accountability, and collaborative scientific research.

On behalf of the United States, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, the NASCO Secretariat and our hosts for the excellent preparations for this meeting.