

## ***Opening Statement made by the European Inland Fisheries Advisory Committee***

I am grateful for the opportunity to represent the European Inland Fisheries Advisory Commission (EIFAC) as an observer at the 27<sup>th</sup> Annual meeting of NASCO.

For those that might be unaware, EIFAC is a statutory, advisory body of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations. Established in 1957, it is an inter-governmental forum for collaboration and information exchange on inland fisheries and aquaculture across all European countries. EIFAC has currently 34 members. Governments, institutions and agencies can benefit from international advice derived from the EIFAC's network of policy-makers, managers, scientists and others working on inland fisheries and aquaculture issues.

A coordinated international approach to the resolution of fisheries management issues has increased in importance as we see every increasing pressures and rapid changes in our ecosystems. EIFAC has a major role in the provision and dissemination of best practice advice to the inland fisheries sector and its stakeholders. In order to fulfil this role in an efficient manner, EIFAC, over the past two years, has completed a review of its operations and role. I am pleased to inform NASCO and the delegates present that at the EIFAC 26<sup>th</sup> Session held in Zagreb, Croatia in May, a new structure for the organisation was agreed by the member states; the organisation will now take a focused project based approach to the development of advice and research programmes under the guidance of a technical/scientific and management committee.

The members have agreed that EIFAC mission is to promote the long-term sustainable development, utilization, conservation, restoration and responsible management of European inland fisheries and aquaculture and to support sustainable economic, social, and recreational activities through:

- providing advice, information and coordination;
- encouraging enhanced stakeholder participation and communication; and
- the delivery of effective research.
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The social, economic, conservation and cultural value of salmon fisheries is not in doubt, and the need to maintain the sustainability of this resource is paramount. It is, therefore, very much appreciated that NASCO extended to EIFAC the invitation to observe this meeting and we are pleased to offer EIFAC's support relating to issues, research or advice pertaining to salmon in its fresh water environment.

Thank you kindly for your attention.

## *Joint Opening Statement made by the Non-Government Organizations*

Madam President, colleagues, we are now coming towards the end of the first cycle of the NASCO Next Steps process with the focus at this meeting on habitat and the impacts of aquaculture. Delegates are already beginning to think about the future. NGOs wholeheartedly support the process – at a stroke NASCO became the first regional fishery management organisation to incorporate its NGO community, creating transparency and enabling us all to assess progress by the Parties and their jurisdictions on their implementation of NASCO agreements on fishery management, habitat, and aquaculture. It is somewhat regrettable that NGOs in some of our member countries are not accorded similar status and are excluded from any effective role in salmon policy and management.

What the Next Steps process has shown us is that there has been major progress in the recent past, with the adoption by Parties of the Precautionary Approach to salmon fisheries management in 1998 and ratification of the Williamsburg agreement in 2003. Progress by Parties includes the significant sums spent by Canada in closing all of their commercial salmon fisheries by 2000, the partial buy-out of the English north-east drift nets in 2003 and the closure of the Irish drift net fishery in 2007.

However, since 2007, progress has been painfully slow. ICES advice has been consistent during this period, that exploitation by mixed stock fisheries poses a particular threat to stocks. Yet while our colleagues in Greenland and the Faroes have continued to heed this advice by restricting their fishery to one for internal consumption only (G), or by not fishing at all (F), most Parties around this table continue to permit mixed stock fisheries. We single out the Norwegian coastal fishery and its catch of around 100,000 fish as giving the most cause for concern, but Canada and several EU jurisdictions also permit significant mixed stock fisheries in coastal waters; we will signal out these fisheries in more detail in the appropriate Commissions.

Of course, some progress has been made, but it has generally been snail-like and attritional. It is clear that Parties who readily sign up to agreements at NASCO, have been reluctant to take the difficult political and/or socio-economic decisions at home that are necessary to close mixed stock fisheries or to curb the expansion and impacts of the salmon farming industry. Failure to take action is all too often attributed to lack of evidence, in complete disregard to the precautionary approach (which all Parties have signed up to); while yet another report or more research is commissioned, our wild salmon stocks continue to suffer.

As for the impacts of aquaculture, the Oslo resolution and its successor, Williamsburg, have been in place since 1994 – 16 years! During that time farmed salmon production has increased by 240%, posing serious threats to wild stocks as the industry struggles to limit escapes and control sea lice populations. Dialogue with the industry has produced some progress, and the latest Task Force Best Management Practice (BMP) targets for zero escapes and sea lice control are to be welcomed.

However, there is a growing frustration amongst wild fish interests, as escapes continue to rise and sea lice become more difficult to control, that dialogue with NASCO is being used by the industry as a cloak of respectability. At the recent Liaison Group meeting with ISFA, the industry challenged many aspects of the Focus Area Review process, and appeared to be backing away from the BMP targets agreed by the Task Force. Backsliding by the Industry

on only recently agreed goals makes the value of dialogue with them questionable, and reinforces NGO concerns that dialogue is being used as a device for postponing the firm regulatory action that is required from governments to protect wild Atlantic salmon from the impacts of salmonid aquaculture. Some NGOs are now resorting to legal action, pressing for regional caps on aquaculture production, and lobbying for the introduction of close containment systems.

A key observation we make in the Aquaculture Focus Area review, which also applies to management of mixed stock fisheries, is that conflicts of interest can arise in jurisdictions where the same department is responsible for managing both aquaculture and wild salmon. Conflicts can also arise when the same department is responsible for promotion of aquaculture and its regulation. Current evidence suggests to us that the fish farming industry invariably receives more government support than is given to the protection of wild salmon.

We remind the Parties present, that NASCO is an organisation dedicated to the conservation and restoration of wild Atlantic salmon, not the conservation and promotion of the aquaculture industry or for the protection of mixed stock fisheries in home waters. It is absolutely crucial, if NASCO is not to be regarded as an annual sideshow, that recommendations from the FAR process are incorporated into national implementation plans and translated into firm action at a local level which can be shown to demonstrate positive benefits for wild salmon.

However, one aspect of the NASCO Next Steps process that we do wholeheartedly endorse is the improvement in transparency that our participation as NGOs has encouraged. It is vital that the process continues, and continues seamlessly. This is not always an easy process, as some of the above statements might indicate, but I can assure you, Madam President, that all the NGOs present here today are completely dedicated to, and active in, the conservation and restoration of wild Atlantic salmon, and we look forward to an open and honest debate about some of these difficult topics over the course of the next week.

