

Opening Statement made by the President of NASCO

Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to NASCO's Twenty-Seventh Annual Meeting here in beautiful Québec City.

It is my great pleasure and honor to serve as President during this meeting. However, I regret the circumstances in Iceland that led to its withdrawal from NASCO and prevented Arni Isaksson from being able to complete his term. He has contributed a great deal to NASCO over the years and it is unfortunate that he is unable to be here with us at this annual meeting. We look forward to Iceland rejoining NASCO, as it has indicated it will.

This is a very exciting time for NASCO. We are nearing completion of the first cycle of implementation of the "Next Steps" process that NASCO initiated in 2004. From 2004 to 2006 a Working Group and a Task Force were established to review the fitness of NASCO for the current challenges facing Atlantic salmon and salmon managers. That process resulted in the development of a Vision for NASCO and agreement on the following three priority areas for NASCO's work:

- (1) Strengthening the mechanism for implementing NASCO's agreements and for assessing their effectiveness;
- (2) Improving inclusivity and transparency; and
- (3) Raising the profile of the conservation work carried out by NASCO and its Parties.

Over the past five years we have worked cooperatively to implement the Next Steps Strategic Plan – including development of Implementation Plans and Focus Area Reports on NASCO's three main areas of work. This year we will receive the final report of the Habitat Protection, Restoration and Enhancement Focus Area Review Group and the Draft Report of the Aquaculture, Introductions and Transfers and Transgenics Focus Area Review Group. At the 2011 meeting, the final report will be made available from this third Review Group which will complete the first cycle of reporting. Having nearly completed this first round of implementation of the decisions of the Council in the Next Steps process, it is appropriate to step back and review whether the process is achieving what NASCO intended – do we have a better understanding of the degree to which NASCO's agreements are being implemented? Have the changes that have been made resulted in a more comprehensive and transparent reporting and is the review being conducted in a challenging environment? Are we more inclusive now and have we better communicated what we do?

The Next Steps process resulted in some dramatic changes in how NASCO operates and when these changes were implemented the Council committed to an evaluation after a trial period. The Task Force noted the importance of moving in this direction in a flexible manner with a view to making adjustments as required. I recognize and appreciate the amount of time and effort that the Parties and NASCO's observers have invested in preparing Implementation Plans, FARs and Review Group Reports. This is a learning process and it is important that we take the time and make the effort to review whether the changes that have been implemented achieve the original objectives and that we are getting a good return on our investment. Importantly, at this meeting we will decide on the format for a review of the Next Steps process.

This is also an exciting time for the level of international collaboration that has been devoted to the SALSEA program over the past few years. This unprecedented effort has resulted in

the completion of research cruises on both sides of the Atlantic in 2008 and 2009 and a NASCO supported enhanced sampling program at West Greenland in 2009 to tackle the daunting task of understanding the mystery of salmon at sea. ICES has again reminded us that the lack of improvement seen in the status of stocks over time is attributable mainly to continuing poor survival in the marine environment which underscores the importance of this collaborative research. I would like to thank the International Atlantic Salmon Research Board, those involved in, and carrying out, the research, as well as the Parties and sponsors for the significant contribution of resources toward this effort. I look forward to hearing an update at this annual meeting and also to the Salmon at Sea Summit planned for the fall of 2011.

As usual, we have a full agenda and only a few days together. I look forward to a productive and engaging discussion at the Special Session and throughout the week. In closing, I would like to thank the Secretariat for the efficient preparations for this meeting and thank Canada for providing us with such excellent arrangements for our deliberations.