

Opening Statement made by the President of NASCO

Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to the Twenty-Eighth Annual Meeting of NASCO. I would like to thank our Greenland hosts for the wonderful accommodations for our work and also thank the Secretariat for the excellent preparations.

It is appropriate at this critical juncture in NASCO's history that we are meeting here in Greenland where we are reminded of the important role of Atlantic salmon culturally, economically, and as a critical component of the riverine, estuarine and marine ecosystem. International cooperation and collaboration to improve our understanding of Atlantic salmon and our collective ability to utilize scientific information to manage the species in a sustainable manner has never been more critical than it is today when some populations have been extirpated and others remain at critically low levels.

The Contracting Parties and NGOs should be proud of the successful effort to fund the SALSEA program. This international collaborative science program could not be undertaken by any one party and could only be accomplished when the Parties identified this as a priority and combined resources. We are now looking forward to the October 'Salmon Summit' to learn about the progress that has been made and ideally identify priorities for future management and research efforts. This is just one example of how NASCO, its Contracting Parties and NGOs have risen to address the significant challenges facing Atlantic salmon.

At this year's annual meeting we will be receiving the final report of the FAR Review Group on Aquaculture, Introductions and Transfers and Transgenics which will complete the first cycle of reporting under the 'Next Steps' process. It is my view that the FAR Reports and review process have greatly increased our understanding of issues and activities in jurisdictions, but that we have failed to take full advantage of the opportunity to critically challenge each other and ourselves to advance our knowledge and raise management standards to a higher level.

We will also receive and discuss the report from the 'Next Steps' Review and I hope we will have a very active discussion in the Special Session focusing on whether the process has accomplished what was intended and how it can be improved. We should critically examine whether NASCO is more transparent and if the Contracting Parties are more accountable for actions taken at home and consistency with the agreements reached at NASCO. We should question what changes could be implemented to make even further progress. The Next Steps process was always intended to be iterative, and we must learn from our experiences to date and adapt for the future.

In reviewing the 'Next Steps' process it is important to remember where we were before we started the process. Prior to the implementation of the 'Next Steps' actions, there was considerable distance between the Contracting Parties and the NGOs and discussions and decisions were more likely to take place outside of the main meeting room. The 'Next Steps' process has resulted in greater collaboration between the Parties and the NGOs, which will benefit Atlantic salmon and there are greater opportunities for full participation during the annual meeting. While, in my view, great progress has been made, this is not the end point. The evolution of NASCO is a process that requires constant review, feedback and, of course, correction.

While much of our discussion over the past few years and at this year's meeting is focused on changes to how we exchange information and evaluate progress, we must not lose sight of the strong foundation and practice in NASCO of seeking the best available scientific information and using that information to make management decisions.

We have a great deal to accomplish over the next three days. We need to complete our internal review of the 'Next Steps' process and agree on procedures for the external review. These are critical decisions for the future of NASCO and of Atlantic salmon.

I look forward to challenging and informative discussions and debates over the course of our meeting and thank you all for your participation and for your commitment to the conservation of wild Atlantic salmon.