Opening Statement made to the Council on behalf of NASCO’s Accredited Non-Government Organisations

The NGOs thank the Council and welcome this opportunity to attend the 32nd Annual Meeting of NASCO at Happy Valley-Goose Bay. We would also like to thank our Canadian hosts for their excellent organisation and hospitality and the Secretariat for their leadership, support and hard work. We look forward to frank discussions and a productive outcome over the coming week.

Wild Atlantic salmon runs in 2014 were disappointing throughout most of eastern Canada, all of the North-Eastern United States and in Europe. The NGOs are alarmed at the steep decline in numbers of wild Atlantic salmon, which, last year, reached a crisis state in many rivers.

Despite these concerning warning signs, there are still Parties at NASCO failing to abide by their agreed international responsibilities towards protecting wild Atlantic salmon. Failure to implement NASCO guidelines on mixed-stock coastal netting and failure to protect wild Atlantic salmon from the impacts of marine open-pen salmon farming are the principal concerns.

It is frustrating to note that most of the Parties with salmon aquaculture operations have not presented quantitative data in their Implementation Plans to provide a baseline for demonstrating progress towards the international goals for sea lice and containment. This lack of accountability cannot continue if NASCO is to live up to its goal of transparency and accountability that was identified in the ‘Next Steps’ process.

The NGOs anticipate that the Theme-based Special Session for 2016 will be one based on NASCO’s aquaculture agreement and progress by Parties to implement it. We have had Theme-based Special Sessions on mixed-population fisheries and habitat. Next year is the time for a Theme-based Special Session on aquaculture that, we hope, includes discussion on new technologies, such as land-based, closed containment operations.

This year, NASCO will be developing new multi-year regulatory agreements for the Greenland and Faroese salmon fisheries. The Faroese have had no harvest since 2000. Greenland, however, reported 58 tonnes in 2014, up from 33 tonnes in 2012 and the largest harvest since 1997. This is a worrying trend in Greenland, especially with 72% of harvested fish being of North American origin and those stocks being so depleted in many home rivers.

The NGOs look forward to discussions on the recommendations from the Working Group on Monitoring and Control that met last autumn. We participated in this group and support the recommendations wholeheartedly.

We expect the Faroe Islands to continue their responsible approach towards marine exploitation, and for Greenland to catch only what is necessary to support a well monitored subsistence fishery. We also urge all other Parties to take whatever measures are necessary to minimise adverse impacts on wild salmon stocks in their home waters.

We are looking forward to this year’s Theme-based Special Session on river connectivity. In-river hydroelectric schemes can cause significant obstructions to both upstream and downstream migrations, but there are many other potential barriers to the free movement of salmon throughout river and estuarine systems. The Theme-based Special Session will be a
welcome opportunity to explore how Parties tackle these issues in their home countries, and what still needs to be done to meet the primary outcome of the Salmon Summit in La Rochelle back in 2011 – to ensure that our rivers produce the highest possible number of healthy wild smolts to start the marine-phase of their life cycle.

The NGOs believe that there should be absolutely no harvest of salmon from populations that are not surpassing minimum Conservation Limits and fisheries should only target populations that are known to be surpassing these minimum limits. We completely support fairness and balance between harvest of salmon domestically and on feeding grounds – a fish saved from one Mixed-Stock Fishery should not be threatened by another when it returns to its homewaters.

The NGOs urge the Parties to remember that NASCO’s objective is the protection and conservation of wild Atlantic salmon. The time to act on behalf of this iconic fish is now, and this should be the fundamental basis to our meeting this week.
Mr Vice-President, Mr Secretary, Delegates, Observers, Ladies and Gentlemen. I am grateful for the opportunity to provide an Opening Statement on behalf of the European Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture Advisory Commission (EIFAAC) at this the 32nd Annual Meeting of NASCO.

By way of background, EIFAAC is a statutory, advisory fishery body under the Constitution 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 European countries. EIFAAC has currently 34 members including the European Union.

Governments, institutions and agencies, including NASCO, can benefit from international advice derived from the EIFAAC’s network linking policy-makers, managers, scientists and others working on inland fisheries and aquaculture issues.

EIFAAC’s mission is to promote the long-term sustainable development, utilisation, conservation, restoration and responsible management of European inland fisheries and aquaculture and to support sustainable economic, social, and recreational activities through:

- providing advice and information;
- encouraging enhanced stakeholder participation and communication; and
- the delivery of effective research.

EIFAAC currently has active project groups looking at a number of prioritised research areas that may be of interest to NASCO Parties. These include:

- fish passage best practice;
- the management/threat of aquatic invasive species in Europe;
- support the 2015 fish passage symposium;
- the 2nd International Sea Trout Symposium – 20th to 22nd October, Ireland;
- the downstream passage of fish at hydropower dams.

The EIFAAC project on recreational angling may be of particular interest, as it is supporting a discussion between stakeholders, including anglers, managers, scientists, commercial interests, equipment providers and legislators on the future of recreational fisheries. This project will culminate in an EIFAAC Symposium which will be hosted by the Norwegian Government from the 15th-17th of June in Lillehammer. I am delighted that NASCO will be actively involved in this important symposium.

EIFAAC and NASCO share the common goal of wild Atlantic salmon conservation while respecting the social, economic and cultural value of this unique species. EIFAAC is well positioned to offer expert advice and support to NASCO on issues affecting the Atlantic salmon in the freshwater element of its lifecycle.
I would like to take this opportunity to thank our hosts and facilitators for their wonderful welcome to Happy Valley-Goose Bay and for the facilities and hospitality provided. Finally, can I wish all of you a productive and enjoyable NASCO session.
Opening Statement made to the Council on behalf of the North Pacific Anadromous Fish Commission

Dear Mr Vice-President, distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

My name is Mark Saunders. It is my pleasure to attend the Thirty-Second NASCO Annual Meeting as an observer on behalf of the North Pacific Anadromous Fish Commission (NPAFC). The NPAFC, as an international commission dedicated to the conservation of salmon in the North Pacific Ocean, shares a great deal in common with NASCO. I would like to extend our appreciation to members of the NASCO Council and the Executive Secretary, Dr Peter Hutchinson, for inviting NPAFC to attend. The NPAFC considers this meeting an important opportunity to strengthen our cooperation in fields of information exchange, planning, organizational and scientific activities to further the attainment of the objectives of our Conventions.

The NPAFC and NASCO face similar challenges, some of which include climate change effects on anadromous stocks, persistence of the illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing in the high seas and funding restraints. In this environment, our organizations can benefit from closer relationships to facilitate the exchange of experiences and ideas to inform enforcement and scientific plans required to sustain salmon.

The NPAFC just completed its 2015 Annual Meeting and International Symposium, which were held in Kobe, Japan, on May 11-15 and 17-19 2015, respectively. The Symposium reviewed the progress toward completing the objectives of the NPAFC Science Plan in development of understanding of ecological mechanisms regulating marine distribution and production of anadromous populations under climate change. A new NPAFC Science Plan for 2016-2020 will be developed on the basis of this review. Therefore, this is a good time to engage with NASCO before this important step for our Commission.

At the Annual Meeting, the NPAFC endorsed, in principle, the concept of an International Year of the Salmon (IYS) initiative. The IYS is envisioned to be an intense, forward-looking and collaborative international research program directed at filling critical knowledge gaps, developing analytical tools and training a new generation of scientists to understand salmon and their future. Our hope is that this meeting will make it possible to work together with NASCO to jointly continue scoping the IYS. I look forward to discussing the IYS with you and learning more about the activities of NASCO. I wish you success in your meetings this week.

Thank you
Opening Statement made to the North American Commission on behalf of NASCO’s Accredited Non-Government Organisations

The NGOs welcome the decision of the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Canada to appoint a Ministerial Advisory Committee to consult and recommend actions to overcome the sharp decrease in Atlantic salmon populations and the challenges to their recovery. We welcome the interim measures announced by the Minister that restrict the recreational fishery in the Maritime Provinces to Catch and Release only and single, barbless hooks in 2015. We look forward to the announcement of further significant conservation measures in the final report of the Committee, expected in early summer.

The NGOs recognise that Canada has decreased its total harvest from 136 tonnes in 2013 to 106 tonnes in 2014. This represents a reduction of 33% in harvest of large salmon and a reduction of 19% in harvest of grilse – a definite step in the right direction.

It is important now for Canada to pursue precautionary management measures that will further decrease its harvest, especially of the large salmon that migrate to Greenland. This is important for the recovery of salmon populations that are not surpassing minimum Conservation Limits and those targeted in estuarial and coastal mixed-population fisheries. ICES concluded that Labrador rivers met 144% of their minimum Conservation Limits for 2SW salmon yet only one (located in Salmon Fishery Area 1) of the four assessed rivers exceeded the egg Conservation Limits. Three assessed rivers in southern Labrador did not meet their minimum egg Conservation Limits.

ICES has cautioned us about the high uncertainty in the level of sampling used in generating the Labrador information stating:

“Since 2002, Labrador regional estimates are generated from data collected at four counting facilities. The current method to estimate Labrador returns assumes that the total return to the northern area are represented by returns at the single monitoring facility in Salmon Fishing Area 1 and the returns in the southerly areas are represented by returns at the three monitoring facilities in Salmon Fishing Area 2. The uncertainty in the estimates of returns and spawners has been relatively high compared with other regions in recent years.” – ICES 2015 ACOM Report, p.155.

ICES also recommends that further work is needed to utilise available data, such as Aboriginal and recreational catches and effort, in describing stock status. The Working Group recommends that additional monitoring be considered in Labrador to better estimate salmon returns in that region.

ICES advises that:

“There is no surplus of multi-sea-winter salmon stocks and no fisheries should operate on mixed stocks. Additionally, in-river fisheries should occur only on those stocks exceeding minimum conservation limits.”

Based on ICES advice, the fisheries guidelines agreed by NASCO indicate that Mixed-Stock Fisheries should only operate when the number of salmon contributed by individual salmon stocks can be determined and each of these stocks can withstand the exploitation to remain above minimum Conservation Limits.
The NGOs urge Canada to expand monitoring and assessment for both adult returns and smolt production to get improved data on the health of Labrador’s salmon populations. We also recommend that Canada restrict salmon fisheries to in-river, allowing harvest only when salmon populations are known to be above their minimum Conservation Limits. To reach this goal, we support live release and the use of barbless hooks in the recreational salmon fishery and selective harvest using trap nets in the aboriginal fishery.
Opening Statement made to the North-East Atlantic Commission on behalf of NASCO’s Accredited Non-Government Organisations

The NGOs welcome this opportunity to address the North-East Atlantic Commission at this 32nd Annual Meeting of NASCO.

Wild Atlantic salmon runs in 2014 were disappointing throughout most of the northern hemisphere, and this was certainly the case throughout Europe, where many rivers suffered their worst runs in living memory. The NGOs are alarmed at the steep decline in numbers of wild Atlantic salmon throughout the region.

Despite the concerning warning signs in recent years, there are still Parties at NASCO failing to abide by their agreed international responsibilities towards protecting wild Atlantic salmon, with mixed-stock coastal netting and the impacts of open-net marine salmon farming being the principal issues. It is extremely frustrating that, year after year, at this Annual Meeting, the NGOs have to report continuing problems with trying to protect wild salmon stocks from these damaging activities.

This year we will be agreeing the Greenland and Faroese quotas for the next three years. The Faroese have not fished commercially for salmon since 2000, and the NGOs urge them to continue this responsible approach to salmon management. However, Greenland harvested a reported 58 tonnes in 2014, up from 33 tonnes in 2012 and the largest harvest since 1997. Although only 18% of these fish are of European origin, they tend to be larger, Multi-Sea-Winter salmon and the trend is worrying when so many European rivers have depleted MSW stocks.

With so much pressure being placed on Greenland and the Faroe Islands to conserve salmon stocks, it is deeply disappointing that some home European countries still exploit salmon in commercial coastal Mixed-Stock Fisheries (MSFs), with Norway, Scotland and England being the main culprits. The NGOs acknowledge that some progress is being made towards limiting the impact of MSFs in these countries, and it is especially gratifying to see that at last Scotland is proposing tougher regulation on coastal netting. We look forward to seeing proposals turned into action for the 2016 season, and for all relevant Parties to take the urgent measures necessary to stop the impact of MSFs in home waters.

The impact of marine salmon aquaculture on wild salmon and sea trout continues to be a major concern, with Norway, Scotland and Ireland being the main focus of European NGO scrutiny. The aquaculture industry is heavily supported by home Governments desperate for economic growth, despite overwhelming evidence of the failure of regulations to adequately protect wild salmon from the harmful environmental impacts of sea lice and disease transfer, escapees diluting wild gene pools and local contamination around farm sites. The NGOs believe some soul-searching is required within relevant NASCO Parties for, while aquaculture has undoubted economic value, there is also an overriding duty of those around this table to protect and conserve wild salmon. But all too often, when it comes to addressing the damaging interactions between salmon farming and wild fish, some NASCO Parties still support the industry and merely pay lip service to wild salmon protection. This has been the depressing reality for more than two decades. The NGOs urge all NASCO Parties to champion an end goal of marine salmon farming transferring from open-net culture to closed containment, thereby building a biological barrier between farmed and wild fish.
We appreciate that closed containment is a long-term objective, and so the NGOs ask that Parties should support further research into more immediate measures to limit the damaging impacts of aquaculture on wild salmon. These could include moving towards growing larger fish in fresh water so that only one sea year is required to bring fish to marketable size, and the genuine fallowing of cage sites, especially during the key period around the annual smolt run.

The NGOs also ask that the NEAC supports their recommendation that the Special Session at NASCO’s 2016 Annual Meeting be themed around aquaculture; its impacts on wild salmon and the existing and future measures required to achieve NASCO guidelines of zero lice and zero escapes emanating from salmon farms.

Mr Chairman, in view of the mounting crisis in survival of wild Atlantic salmon throughout the North Atlantic, the NGOs urge all Parties to develop emergency action plans that strictly follow the NASCO fisheries management and aquaculture guidelines to which all Parties have agreed. We would like to state once again that NASCO works for the protection of wild Atlantic salmon, and that it is unacceptable, for economic or any other considerations, to result in a significant barrier to achieving that underlying objective.
The 35 NGOs accredited to NASCO urge the West Greenland Commission to reach a multi-year agreement that will better protect wild Atlantic salmon that migrate to Greenland from North America and Southern Europe. Greenland’s reported harvest rose to 58 tonnes in 2014 (approximately 18,200 salmon, of which 12,800 are from North America and 5,400 from Europe). The harvest in 2014 was a 23% increase over the 2013 harvest.

Furthermore, the discussions on monitoring and control of the Greenland salmon fishery have identified that there is inadequate reporting by Greenland in salmon fisheries other than the one supplying factories, which is the easiest to monitor and control. The annual estimate of 10 tonnes (about 3,000 salmon) of unreported catch could be much higher because many fishermen do not report.

The increased harvest of European salmon in 2014 is concerning as these salmon are the important Multi-Sea-Winter salmon, which are particularly threatened.

Greenland is now taking the largest share (63%) of the total reported harvest of North American large salmon. The other 37% is harvested in Canada and St Pierre et Miquelon.

Many North American rivers have experienced serious declines in salmon runs that reached a crisis state in 2014. This prompted the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Canada to appoint a Ministerial Advisory Committee to consult and recommend action to deal with the challenges to achieving recovery of Atlantic salmon. Interim measures were recommended for this season that resulted in the imposition of the use of barbless hooks and total Catch and Release in the recreational salmon fishery in the Maritime Provinces in 2015. Many First Nations are also voluntarily transitioning their salmon fisheries to selective harvest utilising trap nets to release large spawners or forgoing fishing for salmon altogether.

The total estimate of 2SW spawners in North America for 2014 decreased 13% from 2013 and did not meet the total 2SW minimum Conservation Limit for North America.

North American salmon returns were near record lows for Quebec, the Gulf of St. Lawrence, Scotia-Fundy and the USA. The Gulf of St. Lawrence includes the Northwest Miramichi River, which only met 21% of its minimum Conservation Limit. In fact, only 30% of 60 assessed rivers met their minimum Conservation Limits in North America. The Penobscot River, the site of a 64 million dollar recovery program met less than 3% of its minimum Conservation Limit.

In 2010, Gardner Pinfold Consultants estimated that wild Atlantic salmon were worth $150 million to Canada’s GDP and supported about 4,000 full-time jobs. These are jobs that are badly needed in rural areas of eastern Canada, where there is high unemployment. Loss of our salmon contributes to significant social and economic loss to Canada.

The NGOs support the recommendations by the ICES Working Group to improve the monitoring and control of the Greenland salmon fishery.

Improved monitoring and control is not enough, however. Immediate action is needed to substantially reduce Greenland’s harvest. The ICES advice is very clear. There is no surplus
of Multi-Sea-Winter salmon stocks and no fisheries should operate on mixed stocks. The NGOs urge that the Greenland salmon fishery be regulated according to ICES advice.