



Atlantic Salmon Federation

World Wildlife Fund



Wild Atlantic Salmon: Implementing Survival

Executive Summary of a report to be presented at the international NASCO Conference in Bar Harbor, Maine between June 4th - 8th 2007

Background

For the past three decades, wild salmon populations have been in decline across the North Atlantic. In some areas, such as the Downeast Rivers of Maine in the United States or Canada's Inner Bay of Fundy, the decline has been severe and reduced the population to only a few hundred fish. There are several possible explanations as to why this is happening, ranging from environmental and industrial factors on salmon habitats to the phenomenon called open ocean mortality, whereby salmon leave their native rivers to spend a season or two in the open ocean to feed, and simply fail to return and spawn. What is known for certain is that large Atlantic salmon populations in North America have declined by 89% since the 1970s.

During that time, it also became obvious that an international approach was needed to save this species, since wild Atlantic salmon migrate for thousands of miles and can pass through many different international jurisdictions. As such, an international Treaty organization was established in 1983, called the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization (NASCO). It is made up of North Atlantic nations that have salmon-spawning rivers, or have territory through which wild salmon migrate. Signatory nations are represented at NASCO meetings by their federal governments, including Canada, The United States of America, The European Union, The Russian Federation, Norway, Iceland and Denmark (specifically representing the interests of the Faroe Islands and Greenland). Non-Governmental Organizations (better known as NGOs) such as the Atlantic Salmon Federation and the World Wildlife Fund have also been active in NASCO conferences, and were granted full participation in 2006.

One of NASCO's earliest and most profound achievements was to dramatically reduce the commercial fishing of wild Atlantic salmon in international waters. Since then, experts and stakeholders have urged NASCO to maintain an activist position when it comes to international salmon preservation. Treaty nations within NASCO are expected to adhere to international guidelines when it comes to domestic policies that affect wild Atlantic salmon, and quantitative scores to gauge their success at doing so are increasingly used. A 2005 study by the Atlantic Salmon Federation and World Wildlife Fund ranking several NASCO countries' regulation of their aquaculture industries is a recent example.

In advance of the 2007 NASCO annual conference Bar Harbor, Maine, signatory nations were asked to submit their Implementation Plans – with a timetable and commitment to action – outlining how they intended to better protect their native populations of wild Atlantic salmon and its habitat, in line with their NASCO obligations. These plans were then judged by an international committee and ranked as to how they observe the letter and spirit of NASCO treaties.

This document provides an executive summary of these comparisons.

Methodology

A review panel comprised of representatives of NGOs and NASCO signatory nations reviewed Implementation Plans that had been submitted by 15 North Atlantic nations. These plans were then assessed against a set of 13 criteria, which had been made known to each participating country in advance of their submission of plans. The criteria included such items as: how complete a review the country provided of the state of its wild salmon; the quality of its wild Atlantic salmon conservation and remediation plans; quality of its fisheries and aquaculture regulations; its wild salmon data and research regimen; the quality of its monitoring and evaluation of these plans, and; input and communications with shareholders, among others.

A vital thread underlying all these criteria was how well a country's implementation plan reflected NASCO standards, and the ability for future reporting to be conducted that allowed for ongoing quantifiable scoring along with other NASCO signatory nations. Another important distinction was that each plan had to have a clear timetable for action and a commitment to follow this action.

Once submitted, the review panel committee's assessment of various nations' plans against these criteria took place over a four-day period in March of 2007, and resulted in a unanimous conclusion about the scores given to each nation. It is important to note that a representative of any federal government would not have participated in the assessment of her own nation's implementation plan.

Nations were given a ranking of 1 to 4 based on their overall average score in the 13 criteria. A '13' was considered a perfect score, and a nation scoring from 10 to 13 was considered Rank 1.

| <i>Rank</i> | <i>Final Overall Score on the 13 Criteria</i> |
|-------------|---|
| 1 | 10 to 13 (perfect) |
| 2 | 6 to 9 |
| 3 | 3 to 5 |
| 4 | 0 to 2 |

Results

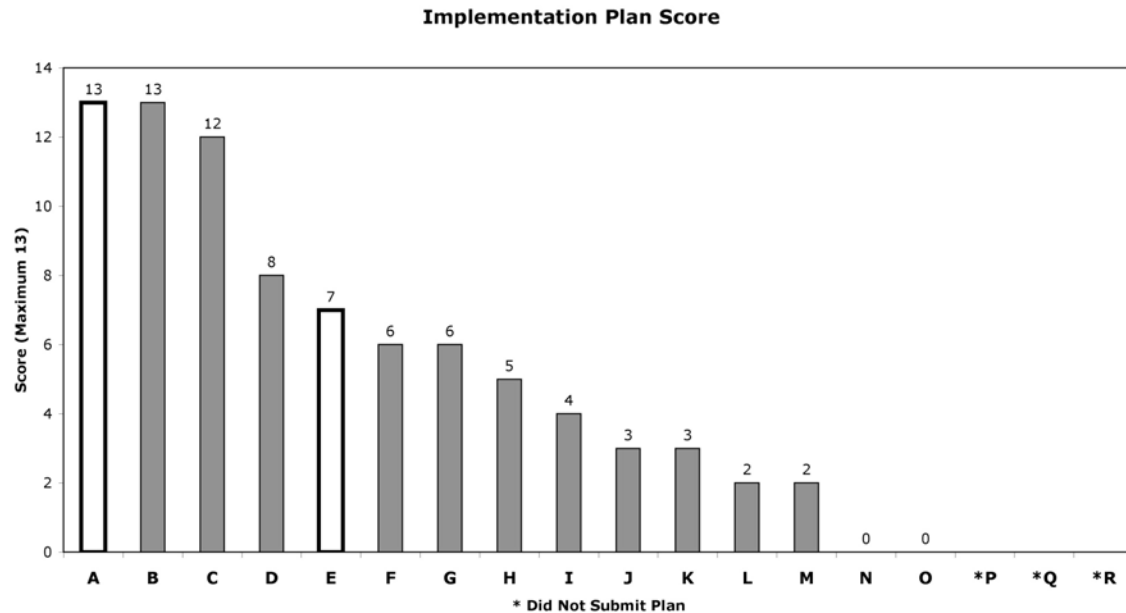
The implementation plans submitted by the United States and England & Wales each earned a perfect '13' score, putting them in Rank 1 along with Norway, which scored a '12'.

Rank 2 nations were comprised of Iceland (8), Canada (7), Ireland (6), and Northern Ireland (6).

Nations earning a Rank 3 status were Russia (5), Greenland (4), Finland (3), and Scotland (3).

Rank 4 nations were Denmark (2), Sweden (2), the Faroe Islands (0), and Spain (0).

Three nations – France, Germany and Portugal – did not respond to requests to submit these plans, a particular concern since wild Atlantic salmon stocks in these three countries are very fragile.



Key:

- | | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|--------------|
| A. USA | G. Northern Ireland | M. Sweden |
| B. England & Wales | H. Russia | N. Faroes |
| C. Norway | I. Greenland | O. Spain |
| D. Iceland | J. Finland | P. *France |
| E. Canada | K. Scotland | Q. *Germany |
| F. Ireland | L. Denmark | R. *Portugal |

Problems

With the noteworthy exceptions provided by the excellent performance of United States, England & Wales and Norway – and a few of the higher-ranked countries on specific criteria – a majority of the participating nations' plans received poor scores because their implementation plans simply were not consistent with NASCO agreements and guidelines. This is bewildering, as these nations were fully aware that they were participating in a multilateral international exercise that was meant to gauge how well they were living up to their NASCO treaty obligations.

In addition, most plans did not divulge timeframes or any commitments to follow the prescriptions they outlined. There was also a deficiency in the way that most nations reported on habitat inventories. Finally, most countries provided little or no indication about how their plans would address any social or economic implications of their wild Atlantic salmon conservation regimen.

A Call to Action

NASCO is to be congratulated in rejecting the model of an annual "talking shop," where nations gather to pose as multilateral conservationists for a few days and then resume a unilateral business-as-usual mindset when they arrive back home. The decline of wild Atlantic salmon stocks across the North Atlantic requires international cooperation and standards. It also requires the ability to objectively rate the performance of NASCO signatories so that reticent governments can be held to account when they fail to live up to their obligations.

As such, these findings – the good, the deficient and the non-compliant – have now been distributed to all NASCO countries, and will be discussed at an open debate on June 5th, 2007 when the North Atlantic community of nations is gathered in Bar Harbour for this year's conference. It is our sincere wish that that Council directs signatory nations to honour the letter and spirit of the NASCO Treaties and Agreements by fully participating in these types of exercises.