

WGNAS Executive summary

Working Group on North Atlantic Salmon [WGNAS], ICES HQ, 3–12 April 2013.

Chair: Ian Russell (UK).

Number of participants: 20 representing eleven countries from North America (NAC) and the Northeast Atlantic (NEAC). Information was also provided by correspondence from Greenland, Sweden, Faroes, Denmark, and Spain for use by the Working Group.

WGNAS met to consider questions posed to ICES by the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation (NASCO). The need for catch advice was dependent on the outcome of applying two indicator frameworks prior to the meeting.

- In 2012, the Working Group advised that there were no mixed-stock fishery options at West Greenland in 2012 to 2014 nor in NAC in 2012 to 2105 that would be consistent with a 75% chance or greater of simultaneously meeting the seven (for West Greenland) and six (for NAC) management objectives for 2SW salmon. The West Greenland Framework of indicators was applied in January 2013 and did not indicate the need for an updated assessment of catch options and no new management advice for this fishery was requested by NASCO.
- A Framework of Indicators (FWI) was developed for NEAC stocks in 2012 and was also applied in January 2013 in relation to the multi-annual agreement for the Faroes fishery. This indicated that the forecasted pre fishery abundance (PFA) for one of the stock complexes (Southern NEAC MSW fish) may have been overestimated; this triggered a request from NASCO for a reassessment of the stocks and an update to the catch advice.

The terms of reference were addressed by reviewing working documents prepared ahead of the meeting as well as the development of documents and text for the report during the meeting. The report is structured by sections specific to the terms of reference of the WGNAS.

- In the North Atlantic, exploitation rates have declined and nominal catch of wild Atlantic salmon in 2012 was 1409 t, the second lowest in the time-series beginning in 1960.
- The Working Group reported on a range of new opportunities for salmon assessment and management (e.g. modelling developments, fish tracking technologies, genetic investigations) and potential threats (e.g. parasites, artificial light). The Working Group reviewed the potential threat to Atlantic salmon posed by exotic salmonid species.
- The four NEAC stock complexes had a greater than 95% probability of having exceeded their conservation limits (CLs) in 2012 and were therefore considered to be at full reproductive capacity prior to the commencement of distant water fisheries. However at a country level, stocks from several jurisdictions were below CLs.
- The risk based framework for the provision of catch advice for the Faroes Fishery developed in 2012 at the NEAC stock complex level was run at both stock complex and country level.

- There are no catch options for the Faroes fishery that would allow all national or stock complex management units to achieve their CLs with a greater than 95% probability in any of the seasons 2013/2014 to 2015/2016.
- The NEAC FWI was updated and the Working Group recommends that a slight change is made to its future operation; such that a one-tailed approach is used where the fishery is closed (i.e. no reassessment is signalled where the FWI suggests a further reduction in abundance). This would have avoided the need for a reassessment in 2013.
- North American 2SW spawner estimates were below their CLs in each of the six regions. Within each of the geographic areas there are also varying numbers of individual river stocks which are failing to meet CLs, particularly in the southern areas of Scotia-Fundy and the USA. In 2012, large declines in abundance were noted from the higher abundances noted in 2011 reflecting increased mortality at sea on 1SW and 2SW salmon.
- There was a catch of 33 t in the fishery at Greenland in 2013. The overall abundance of salmon within the West Greenland area remains low relative to historical levels and six of the seven stock complexes exploited in the fishery are below CLs.

Marine survival indices in the North Atlantic have improved in some index stocks in recent years, but the declining trend has persisted and survival indices remain low. Factors other than marine fisheries, acting in freshwater and in the ocean in both NAC and NEAC areas (e.g. marine mortality, fish passage, water quality) are contributing to continued low abundance of wild Atlantic salmon.