

## SAG(12)4

***Draft Report of the Meeting of the Scientific Advisory Group of the  
International Atlantic Salmon Research Board  
George Hotel Edinburgh, Scotland, UK  
Monday, 4 June, 2012***

### **1. Opening of the meeting**

- 1.1 The Chairman, Mr Tim Sheehan (US), opened the meeting and welcomed participants to Edinburgh.
- 1.2 A list of participants is contained in Annex 1.

### **2. Adoption of the agenda**

- 2.1 The SAG adopted its agenda, SAG(12)2 (Annex 2).

### **3. Election of officers**

- 3.1 The SAG re-elected Mr Tim Sheehan as its Chairman for a period of two years and thanked him for his excellent work to date.

### **4. Review of the updated inventory of research**

- 4.1 An overview of the updated inventory of research relating to salmon mortality in the sea, ICR(12)3, was presented. For 2012, 39 on-going and 65 completed projects had been included in the inventory with an annual expenditure of approximately £5 million. A summary of findings was not available for all completed projects. During the year some major projects had been completed, including SALSEA Merge, and one new project, *'The ecology of salmon (Salmo salar L.) at sea - environmental factors affecting marine growth, survival and migration of Atlantic salmon'* had been included by the European Union (Ireland) since the 2011 update. The objectives of this project are to investigate the decline in North Atlantic salmon stocks in the past two decades in an ecosystem context and to provide new information for use in forecast models of abundance and size of current stocks.
- 4.2 The SAG agreed that the jurisdictions should be given the opportunity to provide any feedback on the inventory to the Secretariat by the end of June, with a view to the inventory being made available on the Board's website by the end of July. It was also recommended that the Secretariat explore opportunities to make the inventory more visible and attractive on the Board's website and that efforts be made to bring it to the attention of researchers and other interested parties.
- 4.3 In 2009, the SAG had received a report from a Sub-Group established to advise on how information contained in the inventory could be better utilised. The Sub-Group's Terms of Reference were to review the inventory to identify areas where there may be

merit in encouraging improved coordination of research and to highlight gaps in the research programme where new work might significantly benefit the Board and might be funded by it. The Sub-Group had highlighted some workshops and study groups that might be considered for funding by the Board and some suggestions for improvements to the inventory had been made. The SAG had agreed that it would be useful to conduct a further review in 2011 but this had not been initiated to date.

- 4.4 The SAG agreed that the inventory provided a very valuable compilation of information on research on salmon at sea but that it could be more fully utilized. It therefore, recommends to the Board that it reconvene the Sub-Group and that it meet inter-sessionally to review the inventory in the light of the findings presented at the Salmon Summit and other information with a view to identifying future research needs and opportunities for enhanced coordination of research. The ToRs for the Sub-Group are contained in document SAG(12)3 (Annex 3).

## **5. Review of Applications for Potential Funding by the Board**

- 5.1 Under the Board's Guidelines for Submitting Proposals for Research, Workshops, Symposia and Other Activities for Support by the IASRB, ICR(09)10, applications seeking either only endorsement by the Board or funding support from the Board may be considered. For projects seeking only endorsement, only a project summary, details of the relevance to the SALSEA Programme, the name of the leading scientist and details of any cooperating organizations are required. For proposals seeking funding, more detailed information is required and this should be submitted to the Secretariat no later than 31 December each year. These proposals are then reviewed by the SAG and its recommendations are made to the Board.
- 5.2. Since the last Annual Meeting, three applications seeking funding from the Board had been received, ICR(12)5. These were as follows:
- A proposal to film at Greenland as part of the Castletown Productions Film entitled 'Atlantic Salmon-Lost at Sea!';
  - A proposal for a pilot project to undertake genetic stock of origin identification of European salmon captured at West Greenland;
  - A proposal for genetic stock identification of salmon caught in the Faroes fishery.
- 5.3 The SAG decided that it could not undertake a scientific evaluation of the film although it recognised that this could have public relations value to the Board and to NASCO. The SAG agreed that the two genetic stock identification projects both have scientific merit. It was noted that the West Greenland project was important because there is currently an internal-use fishery under NASCO regulatory measures and that there has been a marked reduction in the proportion of European origin harvested in the fishery raising concerns about the status of these contributing stocks. The SAG was advised that partial funding had already been obtained to support this project from the Department of Culture and Leisure in Northern Ireland (£16,000) and from the Atlantic Salmon Trust (£4,000) so a further £10,000 was being sought. The SAG considered that while this project had merit the findings would be unlikely to result in changes in the current management advice. The SAG noted that with regard to the project based on Faroese samples, there is currently no salmon fishery in Faroese

waters. The risk framework that has been developed by ICES is currently based on a small amount of information on the origin of salmon tagged at the Faroes 20 years ago. The proposal involved genetic stock identification using archived scale samples that are also 20 years old but are more numerous and should increase the resolution of origin at a finer scale than stock complex currently used in the risk framework developed by ICES. The sum sought was £33,500 although 'seed corn' funding by the Board might enable the remaining funds to be raised from other sources.

- 5.4 The SAG agreed to recommend to the Board that both of these projects should be endorsed and funded or partially funded if resources permit. In this regard, it was noted that the Board currently only had £17,000 available to it until 2013 and 2014 when the loan from the Council will be repaid.

## **6. Progress with Implementing the SALSEA Programme**

### **(a) Report on the 'Salmon Summit'**

- 6.1 The Assistant Secretary reported that in October 2011, NASCO and ICES Co-Convened the 'Salmon Summit', an international symposium entitled 'Salmon at Sea: Scientific Advances and their Implications for Management'. The objectives of the symposium were to:

- review recent advances in our understanding of the migration, distribution and survival of salmon at sea and the factors influencing them;
- consider the management implications of recent advances in understanding of the salmon's marine life;
- identify gaps in current understanding and future research priorities; and
- increase awareness of recent research efforts to improve understanding of salmon at sea and to encourage support for future research.

- 6.2 The 'Salmon Summit' was held in L' Aquarium, La Rochelle, France and was funded by NASCO's International Atlantic Salmon Research Board (IASRB) and ICES, with sponsorship from the Total Foundation and additional support from the French National Agency for Water and Aquatic Environments (ONEMA). It provided a forum for presentation of the findings from the SALSEA Programme and other recent research on salmon at sea. One hundred and twenty-eight scientists and managers from around the North Atlantic, North Pacific and Baltic regions attended the symposium. While the focus was on research on salmon in the North Atlantic, the findings of recent research on Pacific and Baltic salmon were also presented. He indicated that a full report would be presented to the Council but, in summary, the Summit had been very well received. Two reports of the Summit will be produced. Following peer review, 15 of the papers presented in La Rochelle have been accepted for inclusion in a symposium issue of the ICES Journal of Marine Science that will be published in November 2012. A second report, focusing more on the management implications, has been prepared by the three Convenors and the Guest Editor of the ICES JMS symposium issue. This report will be issued to all delegates at the Summit, to all NASCO delegates and widely distributed.

**(b) Report on the SALSEA-Merge project**

6.3 Professor Ken Whelan reported on the SALSEA-Merge project. The project is now completed and the final report has been submitted to the European Commission. This report is available on the IASRB website. A unique, comprehensive biological and environmental database (SALSEA PGNAPES) was developed to facilitate future analyses and a powerful new molecular assignment protocol had been developed - Genetically-based Regional Assignment of Atlantic Salmon Protocol (GRAASP) based on a suite of 14 microsatellite loci. This tool is the basis of the research proposals based on samples from West Greenland and Faroes referred to in paragraph 5.2 above. He indicated that a major challenge will be to analyse all the material collected during the SALSEA Merge project and in this regard a new PhD research project has just been initiated (referred to in paragraph 4.1 above). He also referred to the need to find an appropriate repository for the data and samples. ICES had offered to hold the data from the project but will not manage it. Currently the Freshwater Laboratory in Pitlochry holds the genetic data and the Faroe Research Institute the PGNAPES database.

**(c) SALSEA North America**

6.4 Mr Gérald Chaput reported on SALSEA North America. There had been no new research activity in 2011 but opportunities are being explored for further analyses of the data collected. While there is no overall technical report of the project, information obtained during the marine surveys has been included in a paper which summarises the project's findings that has been accepted for inclusion in the Salmon Summit issue of the ICES Journal of Marine Science.

**(d) Report on SALSEA West Greenland**

6.5 A report on the SALSEA West Greenland programme was presented by Mr Tim Sheehan. In 2011, a total of 430 fresh whole fish were purchased directly from individual fishermen under the enhanced sampling programme (additional to the ongoing, long-term baseline sampling). This was the third and final year of field sampling under SALSEA West Greenland. The enhanced samples will be used to evaluate a wide variety of topics such as age and growth, diet, origin, lipid analysis, stable isotope analysis, parasites, diseases, sea age at maturity as well as genetic aspects and SLICE resistance in sea lice. The samples collected (1,200 in total) are being analysed and a paper involving analysis of stable isotopes from salmon sampled at West Greenland and from several Canadian rivers has been accepted for inclusion in the Salmon Summit issue of the ICES Journal of Marine Science (see 6.8 below).

6.6 The SAG agreed that a priority should be to fully analyse all the data from SALSEA Merge, SALSEA North America and SALSEA West Greenland. In this regard reference was made to the excellent support provided by the Total Foundation. It was suggested that the Board might consider approaching other oil companies with biodiversity foundations if there were specific funding needs in the future.

**(e) Analysis of historical tagging data**

6.7 Since 2007, ICES has held three workshops on analysis of historical tagging data. The reports of all three workshops are available on the ICES and IASRB websites. The Board had supported these workshops by funding the participation of a GIS expert and a hydrographer and this had been extremely useful in facilitating the work. In 2010, a summary of the final Workshop had been presented to the SAG. The Workshop had recommended that all the tag data used by the Workshops should be compiled into a single database available to Workshop participants and held at the ICES Data Centre and that after a period of two years the data should be made freely available. Furthermore, the reports of the three Workshops should be combined into a single ICES Co-operative Research Report to be published in 2012. The analyses initiated by the Workshops will be written up in peer-reviewed papers and two papers reporting on distribution of tag recoveries at West Greenland and the Faroe Islands have been accepted for the Salmon Summit issue of the ICES Journal of Marine Science.

**(f) Progress on stable isotope analysis of West Greenland samples**

6.8 The Board had supported a study to examine any changes in trophic levels of Atlantic salmon through the marine phase of their life-cycle. Mr Gérald Chaput presented a progress report. The aim was to comprehensively sample salmon at different stages of their life-cycle: smolts migrating out of rivers; post-smolts obtained in SALSEA North America; 1SW and 2SW salmon returning to rivers; and 1SW non-maturing salmon at West Greenland. He indicated that as a result of the initial funding provided by the Board, the project had expanded considerably with the employment of a PhD student at the University of Waterloo, Ontario. A paper based on this study has been accepted for inclusion in the Salmon Summit issue of the ICES JMS.

**(g) Reports on sonic telemetry studies**

6.9 Mr David Meerburg reported that the Atlantic Salmon Federation (ASF) has continued to assess estuarine and coastal survival of tagged Atlantic salmon released in rivers of the Gulf of St. Lawrence using acoustic tags. There is now a detector array across the Cabot Strait (37 km north from Cape Breton Island) meaning that each exit from the Gulf of St. Lawrence is now monitored. There are also plans to install a detector array at West Greenland with preparatory work in 2012 with a view to installation in 2013. This year an acoustically tagged kelt was caught at West Greenland.

**(h) Coordination of the SALSEA Programme**

*Report of the IASRB Working Group on Marine Salmon Survey Data and Sample Collection*

6.10 Last year, the Board had recognized that recent international initiatives under the SALSEA Programme had generated some extremely valuable databases. These include biological and genetic databases generated under the SALSEA Merge project, and time-series of data and historical tagging information compiled by ICES

workshops supported by the Board. The Board had recognized that there is a need to ensure that these databases are securely held, maintained and agreed procedures developed to allow access to the data for further research. In addition, the Board had noted the existence of some historical marine survey samples, such as those generated by the international sampling programme at West Greenland, that represent an invaluable resource dating back some 40 years or more. The need to ensure that these samples are being maintained and agreed procedures developed to allow access to them for further research was recognised.

- 6.11 The Board had, therefore, established a Working Group to work by correspondence. The Working Group's interim report, ICR(11)4 had been presented by its Chairman, Professor Ken Whelan, at the 2011 SAG and IASRB meetings. In summary, the Working Group had recommended that the most important role that the IASRB could play with regard to marine salmon survey data and sample coordination would be to establish a meta-database of existing datasets and sample collections, using the list developed by the Group as a basis. The Board had welcomed the Group's progress and asked that it continue to work by correspondence so as to develop a format for the metadatabase and to populate it, in consultation with the jurisdictions, and to report back on progress at the 2012 meeting of the Board. The Chairman presented a report, ICR(12)4, on progress in developing a metadatabase of salmon survey data and sample collections of relevance to mortality of salmon at sea. The SAG accepted the format proposed for this metadatabase and recommends that the Board now request that jurisdictions be requested to provide relevant information.

*Discussion Document from the Chairman of SAG on Approaches to Improving Access to and the usability of Data from the West Greenland Sampling Programme*

- 6.12 Last year the SAG had recommended to the Board that the Chairman of the SAG develop a discussion document on possible approaches to improving access to, and usability of, the data, access to samples and protocols concerning their possible use, particularly destructive use. The Board had agreed to this proposal. The West Greenland sampling programme was selected because it involved multi-Party collaboration.
- 6.13 Mr Tim Sheehan reported that consultations with DFO staff had indicated that the database that was started 30 or 40 years ago and was not in a particularly useable form with the information divided among four databases. There had been personnel changes in DFO and those now responsible are trying to bring the data together but they are not in a common format. Eventually there will be one database of all the material and the SAG encourages continuation of this work so that the information is available to researchers at the earliest opportunity.

**(i) Other activities**

6.14 No other activities were brought to the attention of the SAG.

**7. Other business**

7.1 There was no other business.

**8. Report of the meeting**

8.1 [The SAG agreed a report of its meeting.]

**9. Date and place of next meeting**

9.1 The SAG decided to agree hold its next meeting in conjunction with the Thirtieth Annual Meeting of NASCO.

9.2 In closing the meeting the Chairman thanked the participants for their contributions to the meeting.