



Interviews with Long-Standing Members of the Board

Purpose

To present the outcome of ‘interviews’ with long-standing Board members, to provide information for the Inter-Sessional Meeting of the International Atlantic Salmon Research Board (the Board) on 24 and 25 January 2023.

Background

In paper ICRIS(23)04rev, it was noted that ‘In November and December correspondence took place about (amongst other things) the background, successes and failures of the Board’. During this correspondence it was suggested that long-standing members of the Board would be able to tell the story of the Board. This would provide valuable information in determining the future of the Board. The Secretariat therefore conducted ‘interviews’ with long-standing Board members in January 2023.

Three people sat on the Working Group on International Co-operative Research in 2000, [ICR\(00\)10](#), attended the Inaugural Meeting of the International Co-operative Salmon Research Board, [ICR\(01\)12](#), in 2001, and are still involved with the Board. They are Raoul Bierach (Norway), Ken Whelan (for the EU at the time) and David Meerburg (for Canada at the time). Tim Sheehan (USA) has been involved in the work of the Board since 2004.

The section below draws out common themes and successes and failures highlighted during the interviews, in an attempt to tell concisely the story of the Board since its conception. We try not to repeat information provided in previous papers.

The Story of the International Atlantic Salmon Research Board

Establishing the Board and SALSEA

In the 1990s it became clear that knowledge of survival of salmon at sea was poor, international co-operation and co-ordination was needed to improve this knowledge, but such research would be extremely expensive, likely too much for a single Party acting alone. At the same time, it was recognised that commissioning research was not covered by the NASCO Convention and therefore not core NASCO work. Further, Parties’ contributions based (partly) on catch fund NASCO, and this was not considered the most appropriate way to fund research. Additionally, it was felt that private sources of funding might be available to fund this area of research.

It was agreed that a new body was needed which could identify research needs, and commission and fund research into marine mortality of Atlantic salmon. The Board was, therefore, established. It provided a robust governance structure which allowed it to accept voluntary contributions from Parties, seek private funds proactively and apply for funding from research programmes within Parties themselves, such as the EU 7th Framework Programme. The sum would be greater than the parts.

The Board comprised senior managers from the Parties and had a governance and decision-making role. This was to aggressively seek external funds, communicate the work proactively, manage the International Atlantic Salmon Research Fund (the Fund) and drive the initiative forward. A Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) was set up with a distinct role to consider existing research, assess science gaps and develop and advise the Board on potential projects.

It was this structure that led to the SALSEA programme. The SAG conducted considerable groundwork to develop a rigorous, focused and tightly-structured science programme. This allowed external funding to be sought and successful scientific research to be conducted, especially in the eastern Atlantic. The outcome was the production of important scientific research which has provided a basis for ongoing science and management. Scientific advances were presented at the '[Salmon Summit](#)' in 2011, including advances in molecular genetic techniques. Smaller successes were also noted, such as the funding of workshops, conferences, and the endorsement of research which helped projects to obtain funding. Other benefits included increasing confidence that large-scale research programmes could be successful, improving international scientific co-operation and increasing the visibility of salmon research.

In relation to the SALSEA programme, the Board was considered successful by interviewees because:

- there was a shared vision on the need for science and an associated governance structure;
- there was a willingness to be innovative and put in place new structures;
- of the ability of Parties and the Secretariat to resource the initiative;
- dynamic personalities were involved in getting the initiative off the ground, promoting research and obtaining funding;
- external sources of money (including private) were available;
- the 'Fund' was established and appropriately structured, governed and managed;
- the SAG had a distinct proactive role and carried out the essential, thorough groundwork;
- a cohesive structured scientific plan was developed in advance of seeking funding;
- the international element provided leverage at national level, for example, enabling valuable ship-time to be allocated.

Less successful elements suggested by interviewees were that:

- there was no common east and west approach. SALSEA was more successful in the eastern Atlantic, where EU funding required stringent project management;
- considerable time and money were spent on seeking private sources of funding, with limited success;
- the Board took credit for projects that it was not responsible for.

SALSEA-Track and Recent Years

Following the success of SALSEA, a similar process was used to develop SALSEA-Track. Again, the SAG carried out significant groundwork, including on telemetry. This time the SALSEA-Track programme comprised self-funded projects but lacked the structure and co-ordination of SALSEA. Many of the other successful elements listed above were no longer in place. In particular, there was a lack of internal or external funding; there was no dynamic co-ordinator; and the role of the Board and the SAG seemed to merge over time, such that the Board meeting repeated the SAG meeting.

Further, it was suggested that the Board no longer had time to discuss issues, given very short Annual Meetings. There had been little time between the SAG and the Board meetings, which prevented the Board carrying out close and detailed consideration of proposals.

In 2020, the SALSEA-Track Programme was closed, given that several of the proposed projects had not borne fruit and that funding had not been forthcoming in many instances. Additionally, from 2020 onwards, the SAG did not meet during the Annual Meeting¹.

However, interviewees mentioned elements of the Board that continue to operate successfully:

- the Fund remains one of the most important aspects of the Board. It provides Parties with flexibility in organizing and targeting financial resources that can be ring-fenced (or not) and used to fund research into mortality of salmon at sea;
- the Research Inventory is considered useful, especially for external researchers, to indicate what science is being and has been conducted and to consider what gaps exist; and
- the ability to endorse research proposals continues to be useful to enable research to be funded and conducted outwith NASCO.

What Next?

The interviews focused on the story of the Board to date. However, interviewees touched on what might happen next. In addition to the Fund, the Inventory and the ability to endorse projects, the following possibilities were mentioned:

- that the Board and the SAG might again adopt their previous distinct roles, with the SAG being proactive in identifying and proposing scientific research;
- that the Board might expand its remit to include not just mortality of salmon at sea, but also, climate change, habitat and / or aquaculture;
- that a 'signature' project might arise where the Board could act as a forum for international co-ordination and could facilitate a scientific network to support the project. The Board might also be able to Fund such a project;
- that the Board and the SAG might link into the work of the Working Group on North Atlantic Salmon (WGNAS), perhaps picking up on research that the WGNAS does not have time to do, but needs, to provide data that are currently missing;
- that the Board might consider taking on smaller projects such as funding work on data extraction from existing datasets; and
- that the Board might simply accept financial contributions and manage and disperse the Fund.

Secretariat
Edinburgh
11 January 2023

¹ Please note: New ToRs for the Board were agreed in 2020, [ICR\(20\)03](#), which limited the SAG's meetings. Paragraph 13 states that '13. The SAG will meet only at the behest of the Board. To enable the work of the SAG, the Board will establish separate Terms of Reference to outline appropriate tasks, timelines, and meeting procedures.'