

	<p><i>International Atlantic Salmon Research Board</i></p> <p><i>Report of the Inter-Sessional Meeting of the International Atlantic Salmon Research Board</i></p>	<p><b>ICR(23)02</b></p> <p>Agenda item: 4</p>
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***Report of the Inter-Sessional Meeting of the International Atlantic Salmon Research Board***

***By Video Conference***

***24 & 25 January 2023***

**1. Opening of the Meeting**

- 1.1 The Chair, Martha Robertson (Canada), opened the meeting and welcomed members of the International Atlantic Salmon Research Board (the Board) and their advisers. She noted that whilst other participants were attending virtually, she was in NASCO Headquarters with the Secretariat to assist with the smooth running of the meeting.
- 1.2 A list of participants is contained in Annex 1.

**2. Adoption of the Agenda**

- 2.1 The Board adopted its Agenda, [ICRIS\(23\)07](#) (Annex 2).

**3. Structured Roundtable on High-Level Discussion Points**

- 3.1 The Chair set out the background to the meeting. During the 2022 Annual Meeting of the Board, the ‘Report of the Review of the Metadatabase of Salmon Survey Data and Sample Collections of Relevance to Mortality of Salmon at Sea’, [ICR\(22\)03](#), had been considered. In addition to making recommendations about the Metadatabase, the Working Group had recommended that the Board may wish to:
  - consider its overall vision, scope and purpose;
  - assess whether the funding available to the Board is commensurate with its vision, scope and purpose;
  - identify the priorities the Parties now have for the Board; and
  - consider establishing a process for requesting and reviewing proposals.
- 3.2 During the Annual Meeting, the Chair had noted that it would be difficult to give these recommendations sufficient time and attention. Therefore, she had proposed that an Inter-Sessional Meeting of the Board should be held to deal with these important issues. The Board had agreed that the following steps would be taken:
  - a small Working Group comprising the Secretariat, Chair of the Board and SAG<sup>1</sup> Chair would work together to prepare a background paper for the Board on this item;
  - this paper would be circulated to Board members and the representative of the NGOs with an invitation for them to submit, if they wished, a paper outlining their views related to these questions. The Board anticipated that Board members for each Party would consult with their SAG member to ensure that the SAG’s views

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<sup>1</sup> The Scientific Advisory Group of the Board

were taken into account<sup>2</sup>;

- the Working Group would collate the Board members' and NGO representative's views and outline possible ways forward for the Board; and
  - an inter-sessional meeting of the Board would be held to consider the recommendations relating to the other areas of the Board's work.
- 3.3 In addition to these steps, the Secretariat provided an overview of financial contributions to the Board and 'interviewed' long-standing members of the Board. Therefore, prior to the inter-sessional meeting, the following papers were circulated:
- 'Background Paper for the Inter Sessional Meeting of the Board', [ICRIS\(23\)01](#);
  - 'Call for Views on the Vision, Scope and Purpose of the Board', [ICRIS\(23\)02](#);
  - 'Historic Overview of Contributions made to the Board and its Subsequent Work', [ICRIS\(23\)03](#);
  - 'Information Paper for the Inter-Sessional Meeting of the Board', [ICRIS\(23\)04rev](#); and
  - 'Interviews with Long-Standing Members of the Board', [ICRIS\(23\)06](#).
- 3.4 The Chair gave a presentation on the establishment of the Board and its rationale (Annex 3).
- 3.5 The Chair noted that the Board does not usually have time allocated to discuss general concerns. As such, this meeting would be used to discuss fully the four high-level issues set out in 'Information Paper for the Inter-Sessional Meeting of the Board', [ICRIS\(23\)04rev](#) in a structured roundtable manner.
- 3.6 A summary of the feedback provided prior to the inter-sessional meeting by some Board members and the NGOs to the questions posed in the 'Call for Views on the Vision, Scope and Purpose of the Board', [ICRIS\(23\)02](#) can be found in 'Information Paper for the Inter-Sessional Meeting of the Board', [ICRIS\(23\)04rev](#).

#### Issue 1. The proactive or reactive nature of the Board over the next five years

- 3.7 That Chair noted that, generally speaking, in the past, the Board (assisted by the SAG) had been proactive in terms of identifying research priorities, developing research concepts and seeking scientists to conduct research, such as for SALSEA and SALSEA-Track. More recently, the Board had been more reactive (i.e. taking a sit and wait approach), considering research projects already underway in pilot form, such as ROAM. The Chair asked participants whether the Board should, over the next five years, be proactive or reactive with respect to identifying research needs, developing research ideas, and requesting proposals and soliciting funds.
- 3.8 It was agreed that the Board should be proactive over the next five years in identifying research needs, developing research ideas, and requesting proposals and seeking funds.
- 3.9 In coming to this consensus, discussion ranged over a number of issues. It was noted that a five-year timeframe may be too short and the Board should consider horizon scanning activities at the basin-level, where international co-operation was needed. It was also noted that the Report of the Third Performance Review Panel may be relevant to the future of the Board. A concern was raised that whilst a proactive approach might

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<sup>2</sup> In addition to the paper agreed during the Annual Meeting, a 'Call for Views on the Vision, Scope and Purpose of the Board' paper was also circulated.

be preferred, this had not happened over the last few years. This was partially due to difficulties in identifying a signature project, scientists already working at capacity and funding being unavailable. In addition to large projects, the Board discussed the benefits of supporting smaller desk-based studies using existing datasets, as part of a proactive approach. It was noted that a number of current initiatives were investigating issues related to mortality at sea, such as WKSalmon2 and SeaSalar, but these initiatives were not co-ordinated at a higher level. The Board discussed the possibility that a gap analysis could be carried out as the basis of a proactive approach. Options were considered for undertaking such a gap analysis (see Section 4 below).

#### Issue 2. The chicken and the egg of funding

- 3.10 The Chair noted that, in preparing for the inter-sessional meeting, the small Working Group discussed different models that scientists are faced with when seeking to fund their research. In some cases, the amount of funding available was determined by the funder and scientists develop a research proposal to fit that amount. In other cases, a proposal for research was developed and funding then sought. The Chair asked participants whether the Board should identify research needs and then seek funding, or whether the Board should seek funding, and then seek research proposals to meet it.
- 3.11 The Board agreed that, in general, research needs should be identified before funding was sought.
- 3.12 In coming to this consensus, a number of issues were discussed. It was noted that, in general, the research needs should be identified first. However, if there were relevant funding calls it might be possible to develop a proposal that addressed the call. European Union (EU) research programmes and the Kolarctic CBC Programme were mentioned in this context. It was noted that the work involved in developing a research proposal was significant. One option to tackle this might be to fund a co-ordinator to carry out the task.

#### Issue 3. Sources of funding

- 3.13 The Chair informed participants that, initially, the Board was seed funded by Council and individual Parties. The NGOs had noted that funding for the Board's first major activity (SALSEA) came from an EU 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Research Programme and modest private sector cash donations from the Total Foundation and Atlantic Salmon Trust (AST). More recently, Board funding had come from NASCO Parties only (including EU Grants for Action). Further, the Chair noted that there was agreement that the International Atlantic Salmon Research Fund (the Fund) provided Parties with flexibility to target resources within their own organizations, to the benefit of the Board. The Chair asked participants where future sources of funding should come from.
- 3.14 The Board agreed that its future research activity would most likely be funded from public sources including funds provided by the Parties. The Board agreed that the ability to endorse projects, without providing funding, was useful.
- 3.15 Norway noted that if Parties were to fund research through the Board, it would seek a different approach to that taken for contributions to the NASCO budget – one where Party funding was not determined by reported harvest, but rather some other more equitable arrangement.
- 3.16 A number of other issues were discussed. In terms of public funding streams, it was acknowledged that Parties could apply to public funding programmes in their own jurisdictions to support Board-related research. Parties might also seek to influence

funding calls, as they were being formulated. The Board considered ocean-wide programmes, where salmon research might be a component of a wider project (for example, the BECI Project in the Pacific). It was noted that the Board could be opportunistic about funding sources. The Board also discussed private sources of funding – including corporate funding related to environmental and social responsibility targets. It was noted that seeking private funding has a high administrative burden, which may not easily be absorbed in a small Secretariat. Indeed, some research institutes employ dedicated staff to seek private sector funding. Ethics issues around possible private sector funding were highlighted as a concern (see Section 4 below for further discussion). It was also noted that Government staff may be limited in who they might approach for funding.

- 3.17 The NGO talked about the hybrid model being employed for the West Coast Tracking Project, a partnership programme between AST, Marine Scotland Science (Scottish Government) and Fisheries Management Scotland. The administration and deployment of equipment was managed by AST, a high proportion of the capital costs were funded by the Scottish Government, and the scientific staff were funded by both the AST and Marine Scotland.

#### Issue 4. Big or small

- 3.18 The Chair noted that, in the past, the Board had funded large-scale research projects with significant (big) ‘in the field’ elements. However, she noted that it might similarly fulfil its purpose with relatively inexpensive (small) desk-based studies. The Chair asked participants about the scale of research that the Board should consider over the next five years.
- 3.19 The Board felt that a large basin-scale project could be sought, but that it might consider supporting both large and small projects, addressing issues within its remit.
- 3.20 A number of issues were discussed. It was noted that the Board would be doing its best work when involved in international co-ordination and co-operation at the (Atlantic) basin scale. The desired attributes of any successor to SALSEA-Track set out in the ‘Report of the Working Group to Review the SALSEA-Track Programme and the Inventory of Research Relating to Salmon Mortality in the Sea’, [ICR\(20\)07](#), were noted:

*‘That any successor to SALSEA-Track should have the following attributes: be problem focused with a clearly defined internationally relevant question, which was not solely developed based on the newest technology available; have clear SMART objectives; have clear timelines; have a clear budget; be at the basin-scale; and have an identified owner / co-ordinator. Additionally, it should address issues such as: data gaps / climate change / commonalities across the jurisdictions / mechanisms for supporting new technologies.’*

- 3.21 However, big projects needed a long timeframe and significant preparation. They also needed a champion and a scientific lead willing and able to take on such a role. It was suggested that the Board could support the use of existing data to answer questions in smaller projects and that small-scale projects could lay the foundation for larger projects. There was some discussion of the topics that might be covered by the Board. Whilst mortality at sea was the current scope of research, it was noted that the Board may also wish to consider addressing issues such as pink salmon, aquaculture in the open ocean and climate change.

#### 4. The Current and Future Vision, Scope and Purpose of the Board

- 4.1 The Chair reminded the Board that the ‘Report of the Review of the Metadatabase of Salmon Survey Data and Sample Collections of Relevance to Mortality of Salmon at Sea’, [ICR\(22\)03](#), included the following recommendations, which the Board agreed to consider during the inter-sessional process:
1. consider its overall vision, scope and purpose;
  2. assess whether the funding available to the Board is commensurate with its vision, scope and purpose;
  3. identify the priorities the Parties now have for the Board; and
  4. consider establishing a process for requesting and reviewing proposals.

##### Consideration 1. The Board’s overall vision, scope and purpose

- 4.2 The Board discussed its current purpose and scope, as found in paragraph 1 of the ToRs, [ICR\(20\)03](#).

*‘to promote collaboration and co-operation on research into the causes of marine mortality of Atlantic salmon and the opportunities to counteract this mortality’*

- 4.3 The Board considered whether the scope should be widened to include ‘emerging basin-level issues’. The EU was keen that the Board should be able to address issues such as pink salmon and open sea aquaculture. Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) also mentioned climate change. However, others were concerned about spreading the Board’s limited resources too thinly.

- 4.4 It was noted that if the scope remained the same, the Board had significant leeway in interpreting the text. It was agreed that the scope should be interpreted broadly, such that ‘emerging issues’ would be within the remit of the Board.

- 4.5 The Board agreed to add the words ‘and initiate’ to the first paragraph of the ToRs, [ICR\(20\)03](#). The agreed revised text was:

*‘to promote and initiate collaboration and co-operation on research into the causes of marine mortality of Atlantic salmon and the opportunities to counteract this mortality.’*

- 4.6 The Chair noted that the United Kingdom (UK) had proposed a vision for the Board during the inter-sessional process (see Annex 1 of the ‘Information Paper for the Inter-Sessional Meeting of the Board’, [ICRIS\(23\)04rev](#)):

*‘The vision is that factors causing salmon mortality at sea, the underlying reasons for these factors, and changes in both the past and future, are understood to the level required to target and prioritise management actions by Parties to reduce salmon mortality at sea in order to recover, protect and conserve salmon stocks.’*

- 4.7 The UK explained that the vision had been written to state the ultimate aim of the Board, or what the future would look like if the Board was successful. Some simplification of the text was considered. It was agreed that the vision statement for the Board (subject to minor edits by the Secretariat) would be:

*‘Factors causing salmon mortality at sea are understood to the level that supports the development of management actions by Parties to reduce salmon mortality at sea to recover, protect and conserve salmon stocks.’*

Consideration 2. Whether funding available to the Board is commensurate with its vision, scope and purpose

- 4.8 The Chair asked whether the funding available to the Board was commensurate with its vision, scope and purpose. Some felt that the money available was not commensurate. It was noted that this was a nuanced question. If the Board was looking to support either small or big projects financially (as discussed in Section 3) then the funding available to the Board was not commensurate. However, if the Board were to focus its efforts on promoting collaboration and co-operation with ongoing research projects through facilitating communication, then it was commensurate. This work would incur very little or no cost to the Board. However, it was noted that it had been agreed earlier in the meeting that research needs should be identified before funding was sought. It was also noted that if a need for funding emerged, it may be possible to raise the funds required.

Consideration 3. Priorities the Parties now have for the Board

- 4.9 Having already agreed that research needs should be identified prior to seeking funding, the Board considered how research needs could be identified and who might do it. The Chair also asked the Board to consider how often research needs should be identified and what the Board should do with the information provided.
- 4.10 A number of options were considered. One suggestion was that the Board could ask ICES to provide a list of research needs, that could then be prioritised by the Board. Another suggestion was that the SAG could be asked to identify a prioritised list of research needs based on the current state of knowledge and the Inventory. This might include consulting a wider range of researchers. Clear (but not prescriptive) guidance would need to be provided to the SAG to develop the prioritised list. The distinction between the role of ICES in advising the Council, and the SAG in advising the Board was noted. This reflected the distinction between the role of the NASCO (working under the Convention) and the role of the Board (working under its Terms of Reference).
- 4.11 A further option, suggested by the NGO, was that the Board could fund a six-month project to advise on where the Board could act most usefully, given other projects / bodies working in this space. One reason why this proposal was not considered further was that the funding available was not sufficient to support such a project.
- 4.12 The Board considered the costs associated with the different options. It was noted that costs might be explicit, such as those involved in funding a contractor, or implicit, such as when Parties ask their own scientists to work for the Board.
- 4.13 The Board agreed that the SAG should be asked to identify a prioritised list of research needs. The SAG could invite experts to assist them in their task. Terms of Reference would be developed to direct the SAG’s work. It was also agreed that this exercise should take place once, before consideration of whether it would be needed again. Importantly, it was agreed that there would be further consideration at the Meeting of the Board in June 2023, about what the Board would do with the information provided by the SAG.
- 4.14 The Board considered how its Terms of Reference, [ICR\(20\)03](#), should change to reflect

its discussion. The Board agreed that three bullets from the activities listed in paragraph 2 of the ToRs could be consolidated into one as follows:

From paragraph 2 of the current ToRs,

- identifying research needs;
- evaluating the Inventory against research needs; and
- identifying gaps in the Inventory and setting priorities for further research;

would be consolidated into one activity:

- identify and prioritise research needs.

#### Consideration 4. Establishing a process for requesting and reviewing proposals

4.15 The Chair informed the Board that guidelines had been provided under the SALSEA programme, setting out a process for requesting and reviewing proposals, ‘Guidelines on Submitting Proposals for Research, Workshops, Symposia and Other Activities for Support by the IASRB’, [ICR\(09\)10](#).

4.16 The Board agreed that this document should be reviewed and revised to meet the current needs and the revised Terms of Reference of the Board. Revised guidelines would include how proposals would be evaluated, and also how the results of projects would be reviewed in relation to the Board’s vision, scope and purpose.

4.17 The Board considered how its Terms of Reference should change to reflect this discussion. The Board agreed that three bullets from the activities listed in paragraph 2 of the ToRs could be consolidated into one as follows:

From paragraph 2 of the current ToRs,

- establishing terms and conditions for soliciting, evaluating, approving and funding relevant research projects;
- funding approved projects and reviewing results in relation to the objectives of the Programme; and
- endorsing projects that are consistent with the objectives of the Programme.

would be consolidated into one activity:

- evaluating, funding and / or endorsing relevant research projects, according to agreed guidance.

#### Remaining activities in paragraph 2 of the Terms of Reference

4.18 For completeness, the Board considered the remaining activities in paragraph 2 of the ToRs.

4.19 The Chair proposed that two bullets from the activities listed in paragraph 2 of the ToRs, relating to financial matters, could be updated to reflect the current status of the Fund and Board practice. The Board agreed the following activities:

- developing administrative mechanisms to accept financial contributions to an International Atlantic Salmon Research Fund (the Fund);
- soliciting and accepting financial contributions and managing the Fund;

would be revised as follows:

- maintaining and reviewing the administrative mechanisms to accept financial contributions to an International Atlantic Salmon Research Fund (the Fund);
  - seeking and accepting financial contributions and managing the Fund.
- 4.20 In discussing the financial activities of the Board, it was agreed that the associated guidelines would need to be reviewed and possibly revised, in light of the discussion at the Meeting. In particular, the Board noted that ethical guidance would need to be agreed with respect to seeking and accepting financial contributions to the Fund.
- 4.21 The Board agreed that the following documents would be reviewed and revised and that ethical guidance would be included:
- ‘Guidelines on Acceptance of Voluntary Contributions to the International Cooperative Salmon Research Fund’, ICR(01)10 (See Annex 4 in [ICR\(01\)12](#));
  - ‘Financial Rules of the International Cooperative Salmon Research Fund’, ICR(01)11 (See Annex 5 in [ICR\(01\)12](#));
- 4.22 The text in the box below is the full revised text of paragraphs 1 and 2 of the current Terms of Reference, as agreed during the meeting (they were subsequently subject to minor editorial changes, as discussed in Section 5). This includes the agreement to delete most of the non-bulleted text in paragraph 2 and add the activities to paragraph 1.

**Vision**

Factors causing salmon mortality at sea are understood to the level that supports the development of management actions by Parties to reduce salmon mortality at sea to recover, protect and conserve salmon stocks.

**Purpose and Scope**

The International Atlantic Salmon Research Board (the Board) is a body, established by and reporting to the Council of NASCO, to promote and initiate collaboration and co-operation on research into the causes of marine mortality of Atlantic salmon and the opportunities to counteract this mortality through the following activities:

- i. maintaining an inventory of relevant research projects;
- ii. identify and prioritise research needs;
- iii. providing a forum for co-ordination of relevant research efforts by the Contracting Parties of NASCO;
- iv. maintaining and reviewing the administrative mechanisms to accept financial contributions to an International Atlantic Salmon Research Fund (the Fund);
- v. seeking and accepting financial contributions and managing the Fund.
- vi. evaluating, funding and / or endorsing relevant research projects, according to agreed guidance.

**5. Next Steps**

- 5.1 The Chair reminded the Board of the agreements made and sought volunteers to take action where required.
- 5.2 The Board agreed that:
- it would recommend to the Council of NASCO that the Terms of Reference of the



Board be revised.

Prior to seeking agreement for the revisions from the Council:

- the revised text of paragraph 1 and 2 of the Terms of Reference agreed at the meeting, would be subject to minor edits by the Secretariat and Chair;
- the revised text would be circulated to the Board with the rest of the Terms of Reference for review; and
- the Board would be invited to agree to the revisions at its meeting in June 2023.
- the SAG would be asked to identify a prioritised list of research needs, guided by Terms of Reference developed specifically for the task.

Prior to asking the SAG to carry out this task:

- the Board member for the United States agreed to work with the Chair and Secretariat to develop draft Terms of Reference;
- the Board would be invited to agree to the Terms of Reference, and when the SAG would meet, at its meeting in June 2023;
- the Board would consider what it will do with the results of the SAG's work at its meeting in June 2023.
- the following financial documents would be reviewed and revised with ethical guidance included: 'Guidelines on Acceptance of Voluntary Contributions to the International Cooperative Salmon Research Fund', ICR(01)10, and 'Financial Rules of the International Cooperative Salmon Research Fund', ICR(01)11.

The following process would be taken:

- the Board member for Canada agreed to work with the Chair and Secretariat to develop draft revised documents;
- the Board would be invited to agree to the revised documents.
- the following document would be reviewed and revised: 'Guidelines on Submitting Proposals for Research, Workshops, Symposia and Other Activities for Support by the IASRB', ICR(09)10.

The following process would be taken:

- the Board member for the UK agreed to work with the Chair and Secretariat to draft a revised document;
- the Board would be invited to agree to the revised document.

## **6. Other Business**

6.1 There was no other business.

## **7. Report of the Meeting**

7.1 The Board agreed the report of the meeting by correspondence.

## **8. Close of the Meeting**

8.1 The Chair thanked participants for their contributions and closed the meeting.