



West Greenland Commission

Report of the Thirty-Eighth Annual Meeting of the West Greenland Commission of the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization

WGC(21)19

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By Video Conference

31 May – 4 June 2021

1. Opening of the Meeting

- 1.1 The Chair, Stephen Gephard (USA), opened the meeting and welcomed delegates to the video conference.
- 1.2 The Chair reminded delegates that the Commission had adopted its Agenda, [WGC\(21\)09](#) (Annex 1), by correspondence on 30 April 2021, in advance of the period for inter-sessional correspondence which ran from 3 – 21 May. An Annotated Agenda, [WGC\(21\)09A](#), which included the inter-sessional correspondence, was issued to all delegates on 24 May to inform planning for the meeting. The inter-sessional correspondence can be found in full in Annex 2.
- 1.3 Written Opening Statements were provided by Canada, Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) (DFG), the European Union (EU), the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (Annex 3).
- 1.4 A written Opening Statement was provided on behalf of the Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) attending the Annual Meeting (Annex 4).
- 1.5 The Chair expressed appreciation for these Opening Statements.
- 1.6 A list of participants at the Thirty-Eighth Annual Meetings of the Council and Commissions of NASCO is included as Annex 5.

2. ACOM Report from ICES on Salmon Stocks in the Commission Area

- 2.1 A representative of ICES, Dennis Ensing, presented the scientific advice contained in the ICES Advisory Committee (ACOM) report, CNL(21)11, in a webinar. Dr Ensing's presentation on the advice relevant to the West Greenland Commission is available as document [WGC\(21\)10](#) (Annex 6). The discussions held on the presentation during the webinar are contained in document CNL(21)60 (Annex 7). The Chair thanked Dr Ensing for his presentation.
- 2.2 The representative of the NGOs noted that the ICES presentation included a total catch figure of 31.7 t and an unreported catch figure of 10 t for the fishery in 2020. However, the Draft Management Plan submitted by DFG and the Annual Progress Report (APR) for Greenland for the 2020 calendar year included a total catch figure of 30.7 t and an unreported catch figure of 6.1 t. He asked for clarification on this discrepancy.
- 2.3 The representative of DFG stated that, as previously explained to the Commission, the Greenland Institute of Natural Resources, who provide the information to ICES, are an independent institution and she was unaware of how the Institute calculated their figures. She indicated that the official figures are those supplied by Greenland's Fishery

License Control Authority (GFLK), as contained in the APR and Draft Management Plan. With regards to the unreported catch figures, the 10 t is the figure used by ICES for a number of years. However, as all salmon fishers in Greenland are now licensed, there is a known pool of participants and GFLK have been able to estimate the unreported catch as 6.1 t.

3. Report of the Inter-Sessional Meeting of the West Greenland Commission

- 3.1 The Chair advised the Commission that there had been two inter-sessional meetings of the Commission in the lead up to the Annual Meeting. A meeting had been held in March 2021 ([WGC\(21\)07](#)) and another immediately prior to the Annual Meeting of the Commission (WGC(21)12).
- 3.2 The Chair reminded the Commission that it had met in March to begin the process of developing a new regulatory measure for the West Greenland Atlantic salmon fishery for the coming years. The Commission had reviewed the 2020 salmon fishery at West Greenland and considered progress made in implementing the ‘Multi-Annual Regulatory Measure for Fishing for Atlantic Salmon at West Greenland’ for 2018, 2019 and 2020, [WGC\(18\)11](#). The Commission also began discussions on a new regulatory measure to apply from 2021. The representative of DFG had given a presentation on its ‘Draft Management Plan for the Salmon Fishery in Greenland’. The Commission had established a Working Group to draft proposed text for inclusion in a new multi-annual regulatory measure for the fishery. This text is included in the document ‘Working Group’s Proposal for a Multi-Annual Regulatory Measure for Fishing for Atlantic Salmon [at West Greenland]. This proposal was considered at the March Inter-Sessional Meeting of the Commission and the output of those discussions is reflected in the ‘Revised Working Group’s Proposal for a ‘West Greenland Commission Multi-Annual Regulatory Measure’’, WGCIS(21)10.
- 3.3 The Chair noted that during the inter-sessional correspondence period preceding the Annual Meeting (see Annex 2), suggested edits to the Revised Working Group’s Proposal (WGCIS(21)10) were proposed. These suggested edits are contained in ‘United States Edits on Revised Working Group Proposal for a Multi-Annual Regulatory Measure’, WGCIS(21)14.
- 3.4 The Chair reminded the Commission that, at the May Inter-Sessional Meeting, the members of the Commission had discussed the proposed text and edits suggested by the United States (as contained in WGCIS(21)14) in detail. DFG had also provided an updated version of the Draft Management Plan and a draft of a new Executive Order, both translated into English. The representative of DFG had advised the Commission that the Draft Management Plan had been submitted to the Government of Greenland for approval, but could still be subject to minor changes. The Commission had thanked DFG for sharing these internal Government documents with the Commission before they had been approved by the Government, noting that it was very unusual to do so. The Commission felt that this had been very beneficial to its work. The outputs of the discussions held during the May Inter-Sessional Meeting of the Commission were contained in the ‘Draft Regulatory Measure Arising from the May Inter-Sessional Meeting of the West Greenland Commission’, WGC(21)11, for consideration at the Commission’s Annual Meeting.

4. Progress in the Management of Salmon Fisheries, Habitat Protection and Restoration and Aquaculture and Related Activities in States of Origin

- 4.1 This item had replaced the usual item ‘Mixed-Stock Fisheries Conducted by Members of the Commission’ on the 2021 Agenda, in order to inform the discussions required for the negotiation of a new regulatory measure under Agenda item 6.
- 4.2 The Chair referred to the ‘Compilation of Responses Submitted by West Greenland Commission members / jurisdictions in Relation to Questions 1.2 and 4.1 of the Annual Progress Reports for the Calendar Years 2018, 2019 and 2020’, [WGC\(21\)08](#), and the inter-sessional correspondence that had taken place on this item (Annex 2).
- 4.3 There was no further discussion under this Agenda item at the Meeting.

5. Proposal from Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) on Reporting on the West Greenland Salmon Fishery

- 5.1 Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) had requested that a supplementary item be added to the Agenda for the Annual Meeting of the West Greenland Commission. This request was accompanied by an Explanatory Memorandum (contained in document [WGC\(21\)06](#)). In accordance with Rule 15 of the Commission’s Rules of Procedure, this item (*Proposal from Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) on Reporting on the West Greenland Salmon Fishery*) was added as Item 5 on the Agenda for the Meeting.
- 5.2 The Chair introduced the proposal from DFG and noted that there had been inter-sessional correspondence on this item (see Annex 2).
- 5.3 The representative of DFG indicated that it wished to streamline the reporting requirements for the West Greenland Fishery, but the other members felt that such a change was premature and should be reconsidered under a future multi-annual regulatory measure.

6. Regulatory Measures

- 6.1 The Chair noted that Commission members had been able to consider the ‘Draft Regulatory Measure Arising from the May Inter-Sessional Meeting of the West Greenland Commission’, WGC(21)11, following the May Inter-Sessional Meeting of the Commission.
- 6.2 The representative of the United States recognised the resources invested in Greenland to improve the monitoring and control of the fishery and acknowledged that it takes time to implement new systems successfully. However, she noted, there had been an approximately 10 t overharvest in each of the three years of the 2018 – 2020 regulatory measure. The position of the United States was, therefore, that it was premature to remove the overharvest payback provisions in the regulatory measure, while keeping the quota at the same level, as sought by Greenland. The representative of the United States reminded the Commission that Canada, the EU, the UK and United States had all indicated at the May Inter-Sessional Meeting that the overharvest payback provision was an essential part of any regulatory measure going forwards, but DFG had indicated that it was unable to accept a regulatory measure that contained such a provision. The representative of the United States had subsequently proposed language which she had hoped would be acceptable to Greenland, but, after consultations, the representative of DFG had indicated that Greenland could not agree to the proposed text. The

representative of the United States asked DFG to propose an alternative that it believed would work for all members of the Commission.

- 6.3 The representatives of Canada, the EU and the UK supported the comments made by the United States.
- 6.4 The representative of DFG noted that DFG had previously drafted text that it believed would be agreeable to the other Commission members during the inter-sessional correspondence period. However, the proposed text had not been accepted by the other members of the Commission. She reiterated that Greenland could not accept a payback provision in a new regulatory measure for the fishery.
- 6.5 The members of the Commission used the intervals between sessions of the Meeting to try to reach agreement on the elements of a regulatory measure which would be acceptable to all members of the Commission.
- 6.6 At the fourth session of the Annual Meeting, the representative of the United States made the following statement:

Throughout the two Inter-Sessional Meetings and this Annual Meeting, the United States has been working to try to find a solution to the significant issues of disagreement in the draft regulatory measure – the level of annual TAC and how to address the ongoing issue of overharvest. The United States has provided several options for consideration that we felt would satisfy DFG’s concerns while still meeting the mandates of the other members. However, DFG has rejected every proposal we have put on the table. We are extremely disappointed in this. The other members have shown great flexibility and willingness to compromise and their options have also been rejected by DFG. It appears to me that DFG is not willing to negotiate to adequately address all members’ concerns which leads me to question DFG’s commitment to living up to its obligations under the NASCO convention.

I understand DFG’s position in seeking a 30 t quota for this measure. However, that is not acceptable to the United States given the payback provision in the previous regulatory measure and the 10 t overharvest that occurred in 2020. The United States expects DFG to honor the provisions of the agreed 2018 – 2020 regulatory measure and fully expects the 10 t overharvest from 2020 to be deducted from any proposed TAC for 2021. Additionally, having a 20 t TAC for 2021 would provide a buffer should the typical overharvest of about 10 t occur again this year.

I am very uncomfortable with DFG’s unwillingness to address the overharvest issue as overharvest has occurred in each year of the previous three-year regulatory measure. The United States appreciates the effort and resources that have been invested into the management of the Atlantic salmon fishery at Greenland over the past decade or so. We believe that this investment is paying dividends, and the monitoring and control of the fishery has improved greatly. However, DFG has not yet demonstrated an ability to manage the fishery within the allocated quota, yet the other members of this commission are expected to accept a quota that is inconsistent with the scientific advice which is that there are no available catch options and does not contain best practice management measures around overharvest. This approach is counter-intuitive, and I am struggling to understand DFG’s logic. From our perspective, the removal of an

overharvest provision should only be considered after it has been demonstrated that the fishery can be managed within the agreed upon TAC.

Bringing any concept proposal that includes a 30 t TAC and that is significantly weakened with no overharvest provision to my leadership is very difficult as our administration in office today is very different to the administration we had in 2018. Our current government has openly expressed an agenda that focuses on addressing climate change, the environment and species at risk, such as Atlantic salmon. These issues are a prominent concern within the current administration, and I do expect this to be very politically sensitive, both domestically and internationally, given the proposed approach to this regulatory measure.

At the end of the day, I have to go back to my leadership and stakeholders and defend the decisions that are made here. The United States is investing significant resources in recovering our Atlantic salmon populations and addressing known threats to the species. Our indigenous groups have had to give up fishing for Atlantic salmon in our waters for sustenance purposes that date back time immemorial. It has been mentioned in previous discussions within NASCO that Atlantic salmon caught in Greenland are not only used to feed people but also to feed sled dogs. That is a very difficult thing to accept for our indigenous people and those investing such significant efforts to prevent the extinction of this species in the United States. In the past, a 20 t quota was sufficient to meet the needs of the people in Greenland. It is not clear to me why that now is no longer the case and why DFG is unable to show any flexibility with regard to the TAC, honoring commitments from past regulatory measures or implementing measures to ensure current harvest limits are respected. I truly hope that we can find a way forward that is more acceptable to all the members of this Commission.

6.7 The representative of Canada also made a statement to the Commission as follows:

Canada came to this year's West Greenland Commission meetings with some concerns, mostly centred around two issues. First, as all are aware, despite hard work and progress by Greenland to improve the management of their salmon fishery, there have been recurrent overharvests in the Greenland fishery in each year that the previous regulatory measure was in place. Secondly, we have advice from ICES that catch in the Greenland fishery for 2021, 2022 and 2023 be zero as the majority of contributing stocks are suffering reduced reproductive capacity. This advice has not changed for some years.

Given this context, we hoped that all West Greenland Commission members would come to the Commission meetings this year ready to recognise the survival challenges faced by Atlantic salmon and discuss the potential contributions to its conservation that can be offered by the Greenland fishery. We had hoped that members would be ready to engage in a flexible way to find solutions that would meet the needs and concerns of all members while supporting better salmon conservation.

Unfortunately that is not the way the discussions have played out. We have seen, effectively, no flexibility from Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) with respect to the specific Total Allowable Harvest, despite the status of the stocks particularly stocks from Canada and United States, from

which the majority of the salmon fished originate. Perhaps more concerning – there has been no acceptance that past overharvests need to be accounted for, despite a clear commitment to such accountability under the last regulatory measure, and despite other members having taken strong action for conservation in their own fisheries, most notably the closure of commercial fisheries. Other Commission members have proposed constructive ways forward and sought middle ground, but this approach has not been reciprocated by Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland). Canada has found this lack of flexibility, and this unwillingness to live up to a fundamental commitment under the previous regulatory measure, quite disappointing, and it calls into question the credibility of any future commitments DFG might make with respect to the fishery.

In the course of the discussions, DFG has referred repeatedly to the importance of the fishery to their people, and to the challenges in managing the fishery. We are not deaf to these concerns: many Canadians have a strong reliance on salmon for subsistence purposes, and we understand well the challenges of managing remote, northern fisheries with indigenous peoples. We have appreciated DFG's openness to discussing these challenges in recent years, and to working with other Parties to address them. And we have appreciated the strides DFG has taken in recent years in strengthening the monitoring and control of its fishery.

We hope this cooperative work can continue in this year's fishery and into the future. We know that the stresses on Atlantic salmon populations are many and varied not the least of which are the changes undergoing to the world's marine and freshwater ecosystems. But this should not prevent us from taking action to control our impact on the species. Such action will have limited value if too many fish are still being caught, and it is disappointing that DFG has shown so little responsiveness to that fundamental need to ensure the sustainability of any harvest. We want to state quite clearly, however, that we do not consider the matters of future total allowable harvests, of overharvest during the last measure, or of accounting for future overharvests to be closed or agreed.

- 6.8 The representative of the EU stated that the EU shared the disappointment and frustration expressed by the United States and Canada. He noted that the EU had also tried to provide solutions, acknowledging the needs of the various Commission members, and was disappointed that a solution had not been found. He stated that the issue of the overharvest taken in 2018 – 2020 was not closed. This was a very clear commitment from DFG, under an international agreement, to pay back any overharvest and the EU expected that commitment to be honoured. He indicated that the EU would continue to revisit this issue for as long as necessary. The representative of the EU also felt that this was a missed opportunity. He reminded the Commission that there had been several years of improvement and major effort invested, and he felt it was a pity to now be back in this unanticipated situation. He stated that a bad regulatory measure, with a 30 t quota and no overharvest measures, both of which were very difficult for the EU to accept in an agreement, could be rediscussed in 2022. He indicated that it was important that the members of the Commission work together to consider ways to better monitor the quota to avoid an overharvest.
- 6.9 The representative of the UK made the following statement:

The UK had come into these negotiations hoping to agree a new regulatory

measure for West Greenland that would both recognise the efforts that have taken place in Greenland to strengthen the management of the salmon fishery, but that would also strengthen the protection of North Atlantic salmon by acknowledging and helping to drive down the consistently high levels of overharvest. We are disappointed not to have been able to agree such a measure.

Given the level of effort that has been put into developing Greenland's salmon management plan and improved monitoring of catches, to enable responsive management, to quota, which we are assured should result in reduced overharvest in 2021, we are willing to consider a one-year temporary measure. We strongly support the EU's suggestion to review fisheries management in preparation for next year's discussions.

- 6.10 The representative of DFG noted that DFG was also disappointed in the negotiations. She indicated that the Greenlandic Government was adamant that it could not agree to any payback provision or a quota of less than 30 t. She noted that pressure to leave NASCO was increasing in Greenland, and the Government could not see how Greenland could stay and agree to lower and lower quotas and payback provisions and satisfy the stakeholders in Greenland. However, she indicated that Greenland was still committed to improving management, monitoring and control in the fishery and to continue the work on the Management Plan. Given the measures and actions already implemented, DFG was confident that this would result in better management and control. DFG would continue to improve measures, and this would not change whether or not a regulatory measure was agreed. However, she reiterated that DFG could not accept a quota of less than 30 t.
- 6.11 The representative of the United States asked the representative of DFG what steps would be taken if the Commission were to agree to a one-year regulatory measure with an agreed TAC, and the TAC was exceeded. The representative of DFG indicated that, as in previous years, the reasons for the overharvest would be examined and consideration would be given to how to prevent this happening again in future.
- 6.12 The representative of the EU reiterated that it was important to come to an agreement. He indicated that the EU may be able to accept a one-year regulatory measure, with a 30 t TAC and no overharvest provision, but this would require an inter-sessional meeting to be held to discuss possible monitoring measures for the TAC. He asked whether such a temporary measure, which would allow consideration of additional monitoring to ensure no future overharvest, would be acceptable to the other Parties.
- 6.13 The representative of Canada thanked the representative of the EU for continuing to try to find a solution to the impasse. He noted that Canada was supportive of continuing discussions and felt that inter-sessional meetings will be required for various reasons. However, he noted that the proposal on the table was not the preferred option for Canada in terms of the quota. Canada could agree to a one-year regulatory measure with a 20 t TAC.
- 6.14 The representative of the United States indicated that the United States could support a one-year regulatory measure, but not with a 30 t TAC. She stated that an inter-sessional meeting, as proposed by the EU, is essential. She asked if the Commission could consider a 27 t TAC, deducting the 3 t allocated to East Greenland.
- 6.15 The representative of the UK stated that, given the limited possibilities, the UK could support a one-year regulatory measure.

- 6.16 The representative of DFG asked the EU whether it envisaged holding the proposed inter-sessional meeting after the 2021 fishery. In response, the representative of the EU indicated that this was flexible, but it may be necessary to hold the meeting before the end of 2021, noting that it was likely the Commission would need to hold further inter-sessional meetings in advance of the 2022 Annual Meeting to discuss future regulatory measures.
- 6.17 The representative of DFG asked the representative of the United States whether it could agree to a 27 t quota for the fishery at West Greenland, which would allow a 30 t quota to be set for Greenland, including the 3 t quota for East Greenland. In response, the representative of the United States noted that DFG had indicated that it would set a 30 t quota and allocate 3 t of this to East Greenland. Since this is outside the purview of the West Greenland Commission, the United States felt that this should be deducted from whatever TAC is specified in a West Greenland measure.
- 6.18 The representative of DFG indicated that DFG could agree to a one-year regulatory measure that allowed a quota of 30 t for the entire fishery in Greenland, with no payback provision. DFG was also willing to agree to hold one or more inter-sessional meetings if the other members of the Commission felt this was necessary. The representative of DFG stated that DFG has been completely transparent and will continue to keep members of the Commission updated on the fishery.
- 6.19 The Commission considered the text contained within the ‘Draft Regulatory Measure Arising from the May Inter-Sessional Meeting of the West Greenland Commission’, WGC(21)11. The Commission discussed how the text in document WGC(21)11 could be adapted to reflect the discussions held at the Meeting. The proposed amendments are contained in the ‘Draft Interim Regulatory Measure of the West Greenland Commission’, WGC(21)17.
- 6.20 The Commission considered further amendments to the Draft Interim Regulatory Measure of the West Greenland Commission’, WGC(21)17.
- 6.21 The representatives of the United States and Canada expressed concerns over the level of TAC and lack of an overharvest payback provision, noting that while they would not block the adoption of this measure, they would not agree to it.
- 6.22 The representative of the UK also expressed disappointment at the outcome of the negotiations, but indicated that it would support a one-year regulatory measure.
- 6.23 An ‘Interim Regulatory Measure for Fishing for Atlantic Salmon at West Greenland in 2021’, WGC(21)18 (Annex 8) was adopted by the Commission.

7. Sampling in the West Greenland Fishery

- 7.1 The members of the West Greenland Commission have worked co-operatively over the past five decades to collect biological data on Atlantic salmon harvested at West Greenland. These data provide critical inputs to the stock assessments conducted by the ICES Working Group on North Atlantic Salmon annually.
- 7.2 A representative of the United States, Tim Sheehan, provided details on the West Greenland Fishery Sampling Programme in 2020. He reminded the Commission that a contingency plan for the sampling programme had been developed in case travel restrictions linked to the Covid-19 pandemic prevented the international samplers from travelling to Greenland. The decision was taken in mid-July 2020 to proceed with the contingency plan.

- 7.3 Mr Sheehan indicated that, despite the hard work in getting the sampling supplies to Greenland, the contingency plan had not been as successful in 2020 as had been hoped. However, following subsequent discussions there was agreement to continue with the contingency plan in 2021, especially the citizen science element. This involved the fishers collecting samples from their fish and returning them for analysis. He noted that time and effort would need to be invested to develop the citizen science aspect, and in the meantime, it was hoped that the international samplers could continue to be involved.
- 7.4 Mr Sheehan then introduced the ‘Draft Statement of Co-operation on the West Greenland Fishery Sampling Programme’, WGC(21)13, noting that the most substantive change from 2020 was the inclusion of an additional bullet linked to the citizen science sampling programme.
- 7.5 The representative of the UK noted that the UK would provide two samplers. The representative of the EU indicated that EU – France would provide one sampler in addition to the two samplers from EU – Ireland. A ‘Revised Draft Statement of Co-operation on the West Greenland Fishery Sampling Programme’, WGC(21)14, was tabled to address this additional contribution from the EU.
- 7.6 The Commission adopted a ‘Statement of Co-operation on the West Greenland Fishery Sampling Programme for 2021’, WGC(21)15 (Annex 9).

8. Announcement of the Tag Return Incentive Scheme Prize

- 8.1 The Chair announced that the winner of the West Greenland Commission £1,000 prize in the NASCO Tag Return Incentive Scheme was Maren Levisen, Maniitsoq, Greenland. The winning tag had been applied to a two-year old hatchery smolt that was released in mid-May 1981 below the Howland Dam on the Penobscot River in the United States. The Commission offered its congratulations to the winner.
- 8.2 In response to a question from the representative of the NGOs, a representative of the United States noted that seven tags had been returned from the West Greenland Commission area for inclusion in the 2021 draw. Six of these had been from historical tag releases and recaptures. The winning tag had been caught in the early 1980s.
- 8.3 The representative of DFG noted that only one tag had been returned from the West Greenland Commission area for inclusion in the 2020 draw. She noted that while the tag awards are always publicised in Greenland, the 2020 award had been given increased publicity to encourage fishers to return all their tags, including old tags. She noted that this increased publicity will continue, which, it is hoped, should encourage more fishers to return their tags in future.

9. Recommendations to the Council on the Request to ICES for Scientific Advice

- 9.1 The Commission agreed to the request for scientific advice from ICES prepared by the Standing Scientific Committee (SSC) in relation to the West Greenland Commission area. The request to ICES, as agreed by the Council, is contained in document CNL(21)14 (Annex 10).

10. Other Business

- 10.1 There was no other business.

11. Date and Place of the Next Meeting

- 11.1 The Commission agreed to hold its next Annual Meeting at the same time and place as the Thirty-Ninth Annual Meeting of the Council.

12. Report of the Meeting

- 12.1 The Commission agreed a report of its Meeting.

13. Close of the Meeting

- 13.1 The representatives of the United States, Canada and European Union provided written closing statements (Annex 11).The representative of the UK noted its agreement with the statement provided by the European Union.
- 13.2 The Chair thanked the members of the Commission and observers for their contributions and closed the Thirty-Eighth Annual Meeting of the West Greenland Commission.