

COMMERCIAL "NO-FISHING" AGREEMENTS ARE TURNING THE TIDE FOR WILD ATLANTIC SALMON

For over a decade, in order to counter a widespread decline in wild Atlantic salmon stocks, the North Atlantic Salmon Fund (NASF) has pioneered environmental agreements that are based on commercial principles. These agreements depend on the voluntary co-operation of commercial salmon fishermen.

They agree to stop fishing in return for fair financial compensation and the introduction of new types of employment in the form of new and sustainable sea fisheries or as workers in a revived angling tourism industry. These measures have provided real support for wild salmon stocks on both sides of the Atlantic.

NASF teams in a number of countries have not only taken the lead in developing an acceptable conservation philosophy and effective policies. They have worked in the field to turn their conservation plans into working agreements with the stakeholders.

NASF was initially driven by the urgency to provide safety for the salmon while the fish were on their high seas feeding grounds off Greenland, Iceland and Faroe Islands. This led to the first commercial agreements with long-liners in the Faroe Islands and netsmen in Greenland. The Canadian Government, at great expense to itself, followed these same principles by financing similar agreements with its fishermen in the coastal waters of their eastern seaboard.

The second phase of NASF's plan resulted in the completion of agreements in Iceland, Wales, South West England, the North Sea and in the Northern Ireland Conservancy area.

These agreements have stopped the decline in wild salmon stocks and we are beginning to see improvements in a number of regions, particularly in the reappearance of the bigger salmon that after more than one winter's feeding in the sea return to spawn with the largest numbers of eggs. "The agreements that have been reached so far have already boosted salmon runs in our rivers" said Björn Moe, CEO of the Mo Laksegard in Norway, "We have been generous in our support for these projects and our anglers are reaping the benefit with more fish to catch."

"We have come a long way already and we can be proud of what we have achieved" said Orri Vigfússon, the NASF Chairman of NASF at its headquarters in

Reykjavik, Iceland. "The future of the Atlantic salmon is beginning to look brighter with almost every passing month. There is no doubt in my mind that we have the answers to the salmon's problems. All we have to do is to put them into practice. So let us now go ahead to tackle the obstacles that remain with renewed vigour."

NASF does not believe in wasting time. It now hopes to launch its third and final phase to provide safety for the salmon by extending its protection to the migration routes the fish take as they return from their oceanic feeding grounds. Said Mr Vigfússon: "There is little point in protecting the salmon on their oceanic feeding grounds if they are then to be intercepted by nets along the coasts of Scotland, Ireland and in Norwegian fjords. If stocks are to rebuild they must be given the chance to return to their native rivers and spawn. Mutually-acceptable agreements and new and sustainable employment for fishermen will open the way for this to be done."

Already very large numbers of commercial fishermen are prepared to cooperate with the NASF teams with the aim of rebuilding stocks to the high levels that existed only two decades ago. A pilot scheme is being prepared in Norway and most of the drift-net and draft-net men in Ireland have indicated willingness to negotiate.

Partnership agreements would have huge potential for the development of tourist angling in these regions. In financing its agreements, NASF seeks to encourage the free-market profit motive. It has led the way by raising very considerable private funds. But it also expects the public sector to play its part by contributing a fair share of the money needed to remedy the damage that ineffective management has inflicted on salmon stocks in the past.

"Rod anglers must also play their part by exercising restraint in the number of salmon they take and by working to improve the habitat in their rivers" added Mr Vigfússon. "We may then be surprised at the speed with which the wild salmon re-establishes itself in all our rivers."

The North Atlantic Salmon Fund, NASF, is a coalition of voluntary conservation groups who have come together to restore stocks of wild Atlantic salmon to their historic abundance.

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