



To the Standing committee on Energy and the Environment:-

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Oslo – Norway

Reykjavík, November 16, 2010

Dear Committee members,

Our conservation group wishes to express its grave concern for the future of wild salmon stocks in Norway. We are an international alliance that has been working for the last 21 years to restore Atlantic salmon numbers throughout the North Atlantic. The stocks had sunk to a very critical state in 1989.

The fish currently face two main threats in the North East Atlantic. They are suffering from the impacts of aquaculture and from mixed-stock fisheries where netmen need your help to find sustainable alternatives to salmon fishing.

These fisheries intercept a mixture of adult salmon from many rivers that are returning from their oceanic migration. As I am sure you know, each salmon evolves with a compulsion to return to its home river and every salmon river has its own distinct stock. Catches of a mixture of these fish are particularly damaging to hopes of restoring stock numbers because there is no way that the fishermen can avoid catching salmon from rivers with low or collapsing stocks where every spawning fish is desperately needed. It is also impossible to avoid the killing of salmon of other nations that should be allowed to return to their home rivers.

Norway's continuing support for this type of fishery, particularly in the coastal waters of Finnmark, is in breach of international law yet we have been unable to persuade your government to join the international consensus and work towards restoring the salmon resource to its historic abundance..

At long last, however, we have seen some of your committee members express concerns at the negative effects of fish farming. We would ask you to go further and champion the need to end the mixed-stock fisheries. As you know it is already too late to revive many of your once-famous salmon rivers, but we urge you to take the remedial action that could save the others. Reducing the commercial harvesting of wild salmon is probably the most cost effective way of minimising the adverse biological impact of escaped farmed fish.

It is ironic that the international consensus among scientists and private and public managers of the salmon resource to end all mixed-stock salmon fisheries was reached at conferences in Oslo way back in 1991 - 1994. Yet Norway still ignores its responsibilities.

Adopting a proven solution and launching a partnership between the public and private sectors to bring about the change could be done without harming the interests of the commercial fishermen. Experts in our group have been assisting this process in all the salmon countries and they now have extensive experience in consulting with netmen and longliners, First Nation groups, Inuits, Indians, Greenlanders, Faroese, Samis in the Kola region in Russia and other stakeholders.

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This has enabled the introduction of many agreed schemes to find new alternative fisheries and employment for netsmen who voluntarily cease to fish for salmon. Already about 85% of all the salmon netsmen in the North Atlantic region have agreed to these rescue plans. They now enjoy considerable additional socio-economic benefits and we see many wild salmon stocks recovering as never before. Sadly, the Norwegian Government has refused to share in this progress and delayed putting any effective restorative measures into operation. As a result, in its most recent assessment, Norway's own **National Scientific Advisory Committee** reports the vast majority of your rivers fail to meet their minimum spawning targets. They say that no less than 70% of your rivers are subject to significant over-harvesting and they conclude the situation is worsening.

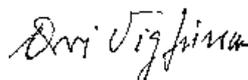
Internationally, Norway insists it has the right to a major say in the protection of migratory salmon, herring and mackerel shoals while the fish are in the waters of the Faroe Islands and Iceland. But Norway adopts a completely opposite principle in allowing its own netsmen continue to target the Russian salmon that pass through Norwegian waters.

Faroese fishermen have been stalwart supporters of conservation agreements and have agreed to suspend their salmon fishing until stocks are fully recovered. Naturally, they are now asking themselves why they should continue to protect Norway's biggest spawners only to see them slaughtered by Norwegian nets before the fish they have protected can contribute to the rebuilding of the stocks.

Every year there is more and more tagging evidence that the Finnmark nets are killing considerable numbers of salmon native to rivers in Russia and Finland. The NASCO Treaty has no jurisdiction inside fisheries jurisdiction but this illegal (United Nation Law of the Sea Treaty, art.66) and your Government has received a number of complaints from the Russian authorities as the continued slaughter of their salmon is evidenced by tags and net-damaged salmon. The biological hazards are confirmed by the capture of Norwegian farmed escapees.

Ingenuously, while admitting their guilt, your Foreign Office officials have claimed in a letter that they are trying to avoid "economic dislocation to rural fishermen in Finnmark". Has not every supreme court in the world decided that the environment takes priority over subsistence fishing? And what about the poor people in Russia's Kola region? What right has Norway to deprive them of food and income?

For the last twenty years, commercial fishermen in Greenland, Iceland and the Faroe Islands in particular have voluntarily helped to return millions of healthy wild salmon to Norway. Why should they continue to protect these fish, only to see most of them slaughtered by your nets before they can spawn? The size of your commercial salmon catches show that in effect every fish they saved was killed in Norway by netsmen. This means that all the goodwill shown by the commercial netsmen and long-liners of these other countries has been utterly in vain and a total waste of time, money and effort.



Orri Vigfússon

c.c Vladimir A. Belyaev, Head of Russian delegation, Head of Science and Education Department Rosrybolovstvo).
Ossur Skarphedinsson, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Reykjavik
Jon Bjarnason, Minister of Fisheries, Reykjavik