

Memorandum for forthcoming meeting with John Browne T.D. Minister of State Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources, February 11, 2003

We invite the Minister to work with the NASF Coalition for global restoration of salmon stocks by (1)making substantial changes in Ireland's basic salmon strategy (2)accepting responsibility under the UN Convention for the Law of the Sea (Art. 66) and the EU Habitat Directive, and (3)supporting NASF in line with Northern Ireland, the Foyle Advisor Forum, Canada, Wales, Greenland, Iceland, Faroe Islands, France, Spain, England and the US to compensate fishermen who voluntarily agree to cease mixed stock fisheries for salmon.

The NASF Coalition expresses concern for Ireland's inconsideration for international salmon cooperation and disrespect for her EU partners in the EU, for high seas host nations (feeding grounds around Greenland, Iceland and Faroes) for North America where salmon has been placed on the Endangered Species List and for maintaining unclear, badly administered and politically motivated management system at great expense to the taxpayer.

The NASF Coalition has shown a great deal of goodwill to Ireland. North America has provided Ireland with resources to enhance its marine research programmes. Iceland has given Ireland proposals for modern management through quota setting regimes, vast funds have been used to protect Irish salmon in the feeding grounds and by presenting a blueprint on how to transform the Irish salmon into a lucrative recreational industry for her rural communities.

Our talks with netmen in all regions of Ireland reveal over 90% are eager to work through the NASF proposed salmon policy. In essence mixed stock salmon fisheries, in the international and scientific context, should be banned forthwith. NASF does not take the moral high note but offers a fair solution for the middle ground. Compensation, set-asides (temporary or permanent) and science based quotas.

We are not joking when we say Ireland's communities are missing 100 – 200 millions Euros every year because it employs a bad management policy. Instead of subsidizing a dying industry considerable income could be earned in the coastal communities. We have success stories to back up our claim and NASF is not looking for remuneration and there is no hidden agenda. Except for, perhaps, a handful of people the vast majority of Irishmen support our philosophy .

For a long period Ireland's own salmon anglers and the many international visitors who come to your country to fish have watched your salmon stocks dwindle. For most of them the pleasure of their visit to Ireland has declined. They all share a feeling of sadness at the deterioration in the sporting quality of many of the rivers. For their good -- and, equally, for the good of Ireland -- this has to be changed.

We can assure the Minister that the great majority of visiting anglers are not only concerned with the quality of their fishing experience. They also care for the resource and are ready to put up matching funds to secure the salmon's future.

If the Minister is prepared to help the salmon reclaim its rightful place in Irish rivers he would make a huge contribution to the promotion of the outdoor activities that Ireland's tourist authorities need to promote and revitalise the image of Ireland as a holiday destination.

Ireland, which was once the world leader in angling tourism, can and should regain that predominance in attracting visiting sportsmen and women with all the economic benefits that position brings. Through the use of compensation plans it is perfectly possible to offset the effects on commercial fisherman's incomes of stopping both drift net fishing and coastal salmon netting,

Ireland can rebuild its stocks. With fish market prices for salmon at the rock-bottom levels that fish farm production has brought about the netted catches of wild salmon are almost worthless commercially. But, if they were rescued from this fate, these environmentally-precious fish could so easily be turned into prolific earners of tourist pounds, euros and dollars, together with all the other associated financial benefits anglers bring to the owners of hotels, bed-and-breakfast accommodation, restaurants, shops. transport, etc.

At the very same time these fish would repopulate your rivers because only a relatively small proportion would be killed by anglers.

These should be the Minister's Objectives:

ABUNDANCE OF FISH FOR ANGLERS, in place of MINIMUM spawning targets. These modest targets are simply not working. Even if they succeed in perpetuating weak runs of salmon, they can never rebuild stocks to the level necessary to attract interest in Irish fisheries, let alone the world-wide attention they used to excite.

MIXED-STOCK FISHERIES: They must be phased out as a priority. Virtually all fishery scientists declare this is what must be done. Nearly all other governments and netsmen's organisations on both sides of the Atlantic are now working with NASF to achieve the restoration of stocks. They are doing this through friendly and entirely voluntary negotiations that involve no hardship for the commercial fishermen who agree to take part.

The NASF Coalition is willing to continue to provide pump-priming funds drawn from the private sector. But the public sector has most to gain and must be responsible for the majority of the necessary funds.

NASF is now setting up a special development fund for Greenland and the Faroes, the feeding ground of many Irish salmon, to reinforce the existing salmon moratorium.

Just as Irish nets kill fish that would otherwise spawn in the rivers of other countries and regions, the Faroes fishery could harvests adult fish that would otherwise return to Ireland each year. The existing Faroese moratorium has saved thousands of Irish fish, yet the Irish public sector has so far made no contribution towards the cost of this valuable management tool.

Quite apart from the natural justice of wanting Ireland to bear its proper share of the costs of salmon conservation NASF believes that the boost Ireland's rural communities would enjoy from the returning salmon fully warrants a substantial contribution from the public sector.

NASF, as we have done in other countries with our internationally constituted team, is prepared to participate in the politically-sensitive negotiations if Ireland would prefer that approach. We feel this is the only quick and effective way the Irish authorities can help salmon stocks.

Law of the Sea Issues:

182.000 salmon quota for the 2003 salmon season would be a breach of Art. 66 of the United Nations Law of the Sea as it is not an establishment of an appropriate regulatory measure and at odds with states of origin (France, Spain, Germany, Wales and England).

Paragraph 2. provides us with the right, after consultation with Ireland, to establish total allowable catches for stocks originating in our rivers.

Paragraph 4. obliges Ireland to cooperate with our Coalition (states of origin rights) with regard to the conservation and management of our stocks.

The status of the Southern European stocks hardly provides for any exploitation activities by any net fishery (Ref. NASF assessment report based upon ICES recommendations by a mixed stock fishery.

Primary responsibility. Should only be exploited near point of origin.

Should Ireland, establish this will result in "economic dislocation" we are ready to cooperate in fair and proportionate measures to minimize such dislocations.

Reykjavik February 10, 2003

Orri Vigfússon