

NORWEGIAN DIPLOMACY – STILL HAS THE SLOWS

YES, WE NORWEGIANS PLEAD GUILTY TO VIOLATING INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL RULES – BUT NO, WE DO NOT PLAN TO CHANGE OUR WAYS.

Norwegian commercial salmon fishermen are to be allowed to continue to damage the wild salmon stocks of Norway's neighbours even though their government admits the fishery is in breach of the UN Law of the Sea. The fishermen catch large numbers of wild salmon that originate in the rivers of northern Russia, Sweden and Finland but pass through Norway's coastal waters as they return from their oceanic migration.

Norway's Ministry of the Environment has issued an extraordinary statement following a meeting with Russian delegates that was supposed to defuse tensions over the way Norwegian commercial salmon fishermen target the salmon of the other nations.

The statement admits that Russia and the other nations are probably right to be aggrieved but says that the Norwegian government is not planning to take any action to end the situation. All the Norwegians are prepared to offer is a promise to continue talking to the Russians about the complaints. Norway's excessive netting of its own salmon has already ruined many of the rivers that were once the favourite destination of the world's salmon anglers.

The statement says: "The Ministry recognizes the legitimate interests of Russia and possibly other countries in this matter. We have also noted Russia's desire to further reduce sea-fishing for salmon in the northern part of Troms county and in Finnmark county."

The environment officials then go on to claim that Norway's fishing regulations for 2008 were "restrictive" when compared to the way the fishery had been regulated in the past. They say the 2008 rules were only agreed after a very lengthy process and that the 2008 regulations will continue to operate in 2009.

The department then says that further restrictions could not be imposed "at the earliest" before 2010. "In the meantime," the statement concedes "we see it as very important to maintain a positive dialogue with Russia and potentially affected EU-countries." Norway's excessive salmon netting has already ruined the stocks of many of its own rivers and wrecked the country's former reputation as the world's favourite destination for salmon anglers.

With its allies, the North Atlantic Salmon Fund, an international conservation organisation formed to combat the severe decline in wild salmon numbers on both sides of the North Atlantic, has already persuaded most former commercial salmon fishermen to stop killing salmon in return for fair compensation for their lost income. It has been campaigning for several years to get the Norwegian government to support this solution of its problems. It has already helped broker a very successful pilot scheme in the Trondheim fjord that it hopes will convince its opponents in the government that can restore salmon numbers without damaging commercial fishing incomes.

Abraham Lincoln in exasperation once remarked about Civil War General George B McClellan, "He's got the slows." The general was a brilliant army organizer, but when it came to fighting battles, he froze up, always grossly exaggerating the enemy before him. "Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg has the same problem", said the NASF chairman, Orri Vigfusson, "the government's latest statement, like the Finnmark regulations in 2008, was deeply disappointing. Norway recognizes Russian interests and admits that Norway is in the wrong, yet fails to do anything concrete to remedy the situation," he said. "As far as its once-

magnificent salmon resource is concerned, Norway is its own worst enemy and it now shows it has little regard for its neighboring countries.” I fear that a few very backward politicians have far too much influence on government policies.”

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. – nasf@vortex.is – www.nasfworldwide.com