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UNITED STATES MEMORANDUM REGARDING CONSERVATION OF ATLANTIC SALMON

In new assessments made by the Joint ICES/ICNAF Working Party on North Atlantic Salmon (Comm. Doc. 71/14) (Para 19) it is stated that "The loss for all home waters catches combined is estimated to be in the range 500-1,900 tons". Thus, as in the past, the effect in terms of total quantity of salmon would appear at first glance to be rather small when we are used to thinking of fisheries for cod or herring that amount to many thousands of tons. Nevertheless, this figure constitutes a significant fraction of the total landings of non-grilse salmon.

The United States has always opposed high seas fisheries for salmon on the principle that proper management of such fisheries could only be carried out when they separated into their natal river runs. There are several items in the Working Party's report that indicate to the United States that the West Greenland fishery is probably having a significant effect on the very costly attempts at restoration of Atlantic salmon runs in several rivers in the northeastern United States. First, we know from the return of tagged smolts that salmon of U.S. origin are subjected to the West Greenland fishery. Tag returns indicate that nearly 25% of the catch of salmon of U.S. origin are taken in the Greenland fishery. Second, we note from Para 19 of the Working Party's report that the estimates given above "refer only to the immediate direct losses to the home waters' catches and take no account of any possible effects of the West Greenland fishery on smolt production, and hence future recruitment, through a decrease in spawning stock size". Third, in Para 20, the Working Party "noted a decline in numbers of late-run salmon and, therefore, a tendency toward a higher grilse/salmon proportion in the Miramichi River in Canada. Although the West Greenland fishery may have influenced this proportion, the Working Party noted that like that of the spring run of salmon in some European countries, this decline actually started before the West Greenland fishery could have had a significant influence. The Working Party did, however, note that changes in grilse/salmon ratio might be the result of the operation

of genetic factors". Fourth, in Para 21 "The Working Party also noted, with considerable interest, that the sex ratio of Canadian home-water salmon in the Miramichi River is about 1:1, whereas, there is a significantly higher proportion of females than males at West Greenland". From Para 5 we note that the ratio has varied in samples taken since 1965 between 2.1 females per 1 male to 4.0 females per 1 male.

The United States believes that all of these factors, when taken together, make a very strong case for significant adverse effects by the West Greenland fishery on the quality and quantity of the returning runs, while at the same time the United States and Canada are spending large sums of money trying to restore and maintain these runs.

Consideration must be given to the real meaning of the evidence that the Working Party has assembled. The West Greenland fishery is highly selective for the older, more desirable, salmon and may well be affecting a permanent and cumulative change through genetic selection on the ratio of salmon to grilse. Secondly, the fishery is highly selective for females and thus the quantitative losses to the spawning stock must be multiplied by a factor of 2.1 to 4.0 in considering the effect this fishery is having on the eggs reaching the spawning grounds and the resulting smolt production.

Moreover, the United States believes that there is a real danger that other nations will enter the West Greenland salmon fishery, particularly non-members of ICNAF. A further development of the high seas salmon fishery would be detrimental to both the native Greenland fishermen and those nations which support the present costs of keeping the fresh water habitat available to salmon. For these reasons, the United States supports the Canadian proposals regarding conservation of Atlantic salmon (Comm.Doc.71/24).