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“WE NEED TO ENSURE THE UK IS AT THE TABLE IN FUTURE RESEARCH ON MARINE LIFE OF SALMON – AND THAT RESEARCH AND MONITORING WORK AT SEA CONTINUES,” SAYS ATLANTIC SALMON TRUST CHAIRMAN

The ‘Ocean Silver’ conference held in London on 13th December, organised by the AST and co-hosted by The Fishmongers’ Company and NASCO (the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation), drew a full-capacity audience of almost 200 delegates, who had travelled from all over the British Isles, Scandinavia and Canada.

The principal intention of the conference was to outline the implications of the recently-completed SALSEA-Merge (Salmon at Sea) research programme for management of salmon fisheries. Many of the principal scientists involved in SALSEA-Merge gave presentations, and there were also wide-ranging opportunities for questions and discussion. A highlight of the day was Jeremy Paxman’s live interview with AST Research Director, Professor Ken Whelan.

“The main message coming from all that we heard during Ocean Silver was that we need to sustain the marine work, but in the absence of the core research funding we’ve enjoyed for the past three years,” said AST Chairman Melfort Campbell. “Can we keep it going? It’s essential that we do. One thing that stood out for me was that only one Scottish and one Welsh index river were included in the SALSEA-Merge research – and none of the presenters at the conference were from the UK. Our government scientists want and need our help to ensure that the UK is at the table in future marine research.”

“We also need to make sure that we increase our knowledge of what’s happening to our salmon – and, importantly, our sea trout - in both estuaries and inshore waters,” he continued. “Much of what we heard at Ocean Silver underlines the importance of ecosystem management, and AST sees it as an important part of its role to ensure that salmon’s place in both the freshwater and marine ecosystems is fully recognised. It’s also crucial that the results of research are translated into practical help for river managers. It was our intention that Ocean Silver should serve that purpose, and I have been delighted to hear so many of the delegates tell me that they found the presentations both interesting and useful.”

Several speakers at the conference emphasised the need to seize opportunities to extend research on the marine life of salmon by making use of the pelagic fish surveys which take place year-on-year.

“We must move to an all-embracing vision of salmon populations which encompasses survival corridors stretching from the most remote spawning burn to the limits of the salmon’s migration pathways. As future decisions are made regarding the management of pelagic stocks in the North east Atlantic, it is imperative that salmon interests are at that table,” said AST Research Director Ken Whelan. “By-catch from pelagic fisheries has an impact on the numbers of salmon which die at sea. If we assume there are three million salmon in the North Atlantic, if we can protect even a small fraction of these by understanding, and ultimately minimising, the impacts of pelagic fisheries – and that could be achieved by something as simple as getting the fishermen to lower the depth at which

they're trawling – that would be a job well done. In the context of the harvesting and overall management of herring, mackerel and blue whiting, the work of SALSEA-Merge has shown irrefutably that this is very clearly linked with the welfare and survival of the Atlantic salmon."

"The Ocean Silver conference was a fitting end of the sampling stage of the EU's innovative SALSEA project, and a perfect follow-up to their Salmon Summit that revealed those findings," commented AST Chief Executive Tony Andrews. "Hard questions were posed in the open session by guest interviewer Jeremy Paxman and members of the audience to the panel of scientists to link the SALSEA data with practical actions to improve the abundance and quality of Atlantic salmon. While it is very clear that there is a lot more work to be done, many people now appreciate that our vastly improved knowledge of the salmon's life cycle will inevitably improve the effectiveness of management in the long term."

"AST was a member of a small group that initiated the salmon at sea research nearly ten years ago. We are now determined to see the effects of that work carry through to better management in fresh water. The ultimate measure is more healthy smolts going to sea with a high proportion of them returning as adult fish," added Mr Andrews.

Nigel Cox, Clerk (Chief Executive) of the Fishmongers' Company commented: "We were delighted with the outcome of this innovative conference, which was attended by a wide range of interested parties, including some of the foremost scientists working on the North Atlantic salmon. It showed how important collaboration and partnerships are, both between different countries and between the public and private sector, in dealing with such complex challenges as understanding the salmon's life at sea. The Fishmongers' Company is increasingly focussing its work on helping fisheries management organisations to build effective partnerships of this kind and on providing a forum for such firmly science-based debate. We were very happy to be able to contribute to the AST's initiative and congratulate them on its success."

For further information please contact Tony Andrews on 07748 634658

Notes for editors: The Atlantic Salmon Trust, set up in 1967, promotes conservation of wild salmon and sea trout stocks to levels where they are sustainable, and addresses concerns about declining stocks of these fish. UK based, with Atlantic-wide scope, the AST champions the fish themselves, and does not represent any other interests or body. The AST's work is focused on:

- facilitating and promoting research into understanding & conservation of wild salmon and sea trout stocks
- using sound, peer-reviewed science to influence governments and public opinion, in furtherance of conservation of these species

The AST has charitable status; it is not a membership body, and its work is financed entirely by donations.