



PRESS RELEASE – 28 February 2014

ACTIVITIES SINCE THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY, 2012

NAMMCO - the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission - is an international body for cooperation on the conservation, management and study of marine mammals in the North Atlantic. The North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission held its 22nd Council meeting from 25 – 27 February 2014, in Oslo, Norway. The member countries of NAMMCO, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland and Norway again confirmed their commitment to ensuring the sustainable utilisation of marine mammals through active regional cooperation and science-based management decisions.

The Governments of Canada, Denmark, Japan and the Russian Federation are represented by observers at meetings of NAMMCO, as well as other international governmental organizations within the fields of fisheries and whaling.

Key events and conclusions from the meeting included the following:

- **Marine Mammals in the context of Food Security**

At a ministerial meeting in 2012, NAMMCO agreed to look at the possibilities of organising an international event where the use of marine mammal products will be examined in the context of global food security. Marine mammals are an under-utilised food resource that undoubtedly is one of the most ecological on the planet. A planning group has now been charged with preparing the event in 2015.

- **Manuals on whale hunting**

NAMMCO has completed two authoritative manuals: one dealing with large baleen whaling and the use of whaling cannon and the penthrite grenade, and a second dealing specifically with the use of the spinal lance and hook in the pilot whale hunt. These are the first comprehensive manuals for hunters that detail use, maintenance, weaponry and ballistics information with a focus on safety. An English language version of each will be accessible shortly on www.nammco.no, and the manuals will be available in native languages as required for the hunting communities.

- **Online free-access NAMMCO Scientific Publications**

Online publication has been established in collaboration with the University of Tromsø's (UIT) Septentrio Academic Publishing. The journal website (<http://septentrio.uit.no/index.php/NAMMCOSP/index>) published the first paper in August 2013, and as of February 2014, has had 1,900 visitors from 66 countries.

- **Inspection and Observation**

NAMMCO has an international observation scheme to monitor whether national legislation and decisions made by the Commission are respected. Observers are appointed to report on hunting activities in member countries. The effort of the control scheme for the 2014 season is the Norwegian seal hunt. A training course for observers appointed under the NAMMCO Joint Control Scheme for the Hunting of Marine Mammals took place in March 2013 with participation of 14 candidates.

- **Counting whales**

The series of North Atlantic Sightings Surveys has been the Flag ship of NAMMCO and is of vital importance for the sustainable management of cetacean stocks in the NAMMCO area. Member nations are planning the sixth comprehensive trans-North Atlantic cetacean Sightings Survey (T-NASS). T-NASS will be coordinated with other national surveys in the area in the summer of 2015.

- **Improving assessments**

Tagging of free ranging animals plays an increasing role in management decisions of marine mammals. Examples include a harbour porpoise tagged off West Greenland that repeatedly crossed the southern Davis Strait to Canada while another moved north to the Disko Bay, south to East Greenland and south east into deep waters in the

central North Atlantic where it wintered. Pilot whales tagged of the Faroe Islands were tracked close to the Azores. Hunter-gathered biological samples and data were also important in the advice for larger quotas of walrus in Greenland.

- **Sea ice retreat and seals**

Harp seals are major top predators in the Barents Sea/White Sea. In June they disperse to feed, following the receding ice edge and moving northwards, thus replenishing their energy reserves. It has been observed that body condition in the most recent decade is reduced compared to previous years. Concurrently with this, the ice free area of the northern part of the Barents Sea has increased during summer, and some fish species, such as cod, have extended their range northwards. Competition between harp seals and other predators such as cod for shared resources such as krill, may have contributed to such negative effects on condition. Longer migration routes to the ice edge with increased energy expenditure between the breeding/moulting areas and feeding areas may certainly also have contributed to the reduced recent harp seal body condition.

- **EU trade ban on seal products – WTO case**

NAMMCO reiterates that the EU seal ban regulation ignores and undermines the internationally recognized principles on which conservation and management of marine resources in the North Atlantic are firmly based. It has serious and detrimental consequences for the economies of the many communities dependent on abundant seal stocks across the North Atlantic, including Inuit communities. This issue involves important principles, such as the right to sustainably harvest living marine resources and to sell products derived from hunting and fishing.

A WTO panel concluded that EUs seal regulation violates WTO rules concerning non-discrimination. However, the panel did not conclude that the regulation is more trade restrictive than necessary. Norway, Canada and the EU have appealed the WTO Panels findings, and Iceland has made a submission as a third party. A decision is expected in April/May 2014.

- **US certification of Iceland**

Iceland informed that it had recently been certified under the Pelly Amendment by the US Secretary of Interior. The US authorities base their certification on the assertion that Iceland's international trade in whale products diminishes the effectiveness of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) as Iceland's reservations to the CITES Appendices listings of fin and minke whales allegedly lack an adequate scientific basis. To the contrary, the fin and minke whale stocks around Iceland are abundant and the quotas are based on scientific advice from NAMMCO. The US certification has therefore no scientific basis.

NAMMCO members supported the view that this certification entirely contradicts the internationally recognized principles upon which NAMMCO is based, in particular the principle of sustainable utilization of all living marine resources.

North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission

Postbox 6453, Sykehusveien 21-23, N-9294 Tromsø, Norway.

Tel: +47 77687371; Fax: +47 77687374; E-mail: nammco-sec@nammco.no

Website: www.nammco.no