



PRESS RELEASE – 5 February 2015

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 23rd Council meeting from 3 – 5 February 2015, in Reykjavik, Iceland. 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 were represented by observers at the meeting, as well as other international governmental organizations within the fields of fisheries (Northeast Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO), North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC), and South East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (SEAFO)) and whaling (International Whaling Commission (IWC)).

Key events and conclusions from the meeting included the following:

- **Ethics of Hunting Marine Mammals**

Professor Henry Alexander Henrysson of the Centre for Ethics at the University of Iceland gave a scholarly and thought-provoking presentation *The Hunting of Marine Mammals: Conflict, Consensus and a Moral Code* during the opening session of the meeting. The talk explored and exposed the popular opinions and taboos with respect to hunting in general but specifically concerning marine mammals. This catalysed many questions, and provided an excellent introduction to NAMMCO's interest in promoting marine mammals as a food resource.

- **Marine Mammals and Food Security**

Following a ministerial meeting in 2012, NAMMCO decided to examine the use of marine mammal products in the context of global food security. A Planning Group established at NAMMCO 22 has now outlined two main goals 1) production of a background document reviewing and compiling existing material on the topic, and 2) ways to communicate the message.

- **Manuals on Whale Hunting**

NAMMCO has now completed all three authoritative manuals: one dealing with large baleen whaling and the use of whaling cannon and the penthrite grenade, a second dealing specifically with the use of the spinal lance and hook in the pilot whale hunt, and just recently, the third and last one that is dealing with hunting of small cetaceans in Greenland. These provide details on use, maintenance, weaponry and ballistics information with a focus on safety for hunters and improved animal welfare. All are available online at www.nammco.no in English language. The manuals are also available in native languages as required for the hunting communities.

- **NAMMCO Scientific Publications – free online**

The journal website (<http://septentrio.uit.no/index.php/NAMMCOASP/index>), as of 30 January 2015, has had almost 4,000 visitors from 97 countries since its launch in August 2013. The *Walrus of the North Atlantic* volume 9 has now been published both online and in hard copy. The volume 10 on *Age estimation of marine mammals with a focus on monodontids* has 8 papers published online as “online early versions”. All previous volumes 1-8 incl. are now accessible on the journal website.

- **Inspection and Observation**

NAMMCO operates 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 scope for 2015 is whaling in the Faroe Islands.

- **Whale Surveys**

The series of North Atlantic Sightings Surveys (NASS) has been the flagship of NAMMCO and is of vital importance for the sustainable management of cetacean stocks in the NAMMCO area. Member nations are planning the sixth North Atlantic cetacean Sightings Survey (NASS). NASS will be coordinated with other national surveys in the area in the summer of 2015, and the area to be covered extends 1,740,000 square nautical miles including areas around West, Northeast and East Greenland, Jan Mayen Central Atlantic, north and south of Iceland and areas along and to the west of Norway encompassing the area around the Faroe Islands.

- **International Cooperation**

Cooperation between NAMMCO and ICES (International Council for Exploration of the Sea) regarding the scientific seal working group, WGHARP which is the successor to the former ICES/NAFO WG on harp and hooded seals, is in the process of formalisation. This new link with ICES and NAFO is recognition of NAMMCO's important role in seal scientific and management advice.

- **Climate Change – Effects on Ice-breeding Seals**

Of concern to NAMMCO, is the ice retreat with subsequent habitat loss which is a challenge for all ice breeding seals, harp seals included. Harp seals require stable ice for pupping, nursing and the first weeks after weaning when the young develop the capacity to swim and feed. It has been observed that they may respond to poor ice conditions in different ways, depending on the presence or absence of ice at the beginning of the pupping period. If no ice was present, females moved away from their traditional whelping areas to find suitable ice. If small amounts of ice were present, females gave birth even if the ice was too thin to sustain the pups, resulting in high pup mortality. If the predicted warming trends continue, ice-breeding harp seals will encounter more years with poor ice conditions and may eventually adapt by moving to alternative areas. Until then, they will continue to have increased levels of mortality.

- **Scientific Advice**

Scientific advice forms the basis of management advice in NAMMCO, and through the Scientific Committee, many specialist topics are addressed through Working groups. During 2015, topics to be addressed include stock assessments of walrus, narwhal and beluga, fin, common minke and humpback whales, and a special symposium on disturbance to marine mammals in their environment. In addition an expert working group on assessment of large whale killing methods.

- **New General Secretary**

The meeting acknowledged the 10 years of service by the present General Secretary, Dr Christina Lockyer, who will resign 1 March 2015, and thanked her for her good work and long service. It was announced that the new General Secretary, Dr Geneviève Desportes, who has had a long affiliation with NAMMCO through her work in the Scientific Committee, would be commencing her appointment in April 2015.

Regarding Council, the present Chair, Ms Ásta Einarisdóttir (Iceland) was re-elected for a further term of office, as was the vice-Chair, Ms Amalie Jessen (Greenland).

North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission

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