



PRESS RELEASE
17 September 2011

North Atlantic Whaling and Sealing in 2011 and the Future

The North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission held its 20th annual meeting from 13-15 September 2011, 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.

Keynote speaker Mr Karsten Klepsvik from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, addressed the Council delegates with a talk about the current state of whaling, the marketing of marine mammal products and prospects for the future of whaling activities. He commented that recent international developments indicate that NAMMCO will have even more significance in the future for conservation and management advice with regard to whales.

Key events and conclusions from the meeting included the following:

Status of whale stocks

All requested stock assessments for large whale species in the North Atlantic have now been finalized based on sightings data from the Trans North Atlantic Cetacean Sightings Surveys (T-NASS) in 2007, and additionally in 2009. Management procedures applied have been derived from those already developed by the Scientific Committee of the IWC using the Revised Management Procedure (RMP) approach. An RMP-like approach has been recommended by the Scientific Committee of NAMMCO for some large whale stocks in their discussions on general models to be adopted by NAMMCO. These stock assessments by the Scientific Committee of NAMMCO constitute the main basis for catch limits set for some baleen whale stocks (fin and minke whales) in the North Atlantic.

Additionally, based on T-NASS data, an updated abundance estimate for pilot whales has been made in the areas surveyed in 2007. Although the combined area represented is small and not directly comparable with previous surveys, the available information gives no reason to amend previous conclusions on the sustainability of the Faroese catch.

The next regular NASS, North Atlantic Sighting Survey, is being scheduled to take place between 2013 and 2015, and planning is already under way.

Status of seal stocks

A new Management Plan for **grey and harbour seals** in Norway, reviewed by the NAMMCO Scientific Committee, and implemented in Norway since 2011, is aimed at ensuring sustainable and viable populations of these species within their natural distribution. The Norwegian Ministry of Fisheries and Coastal Affairs has decided to stabilize the grey seal population at a target level (TL) equal to 1,200 pups born annually, and to stabilize the harbour seal population at a TL of around 7,000 counted animals during the moult. Hunting quotas are used to stabilize the populations at the TL, and measures should be designed to ensure the greatest impact in areas where there is documented significant damage to the fishing industry from seals.

In December 2010, the US issued notifications that the **ringed seal and Pacific bearded seal** are being proposed to be listed as Threatened on the US Endangered Species Act (ESA) across their respective ranges. NAMMCO and Greenland submitted information to the hearing pointing out Greenland's role and jurisdiction in the management of this species in the North Atlantic, and that there are no biological arguments to list the ring seals in the North Atlantic areas.

Ecosystem Management and Modeling

The Scientific Committee Working group on Marine Mammal – Fisheries Interactions continued its work on development of a large international ecosystem modeling project. A network has been established between several leading scientists in this field aimed at securing funding for the project which includes applying four different modeling approaches to two data rich areas, the Barents Sea and Icelandic coastal waters.

Expert Review of Small Whale Killing

The Committee on Hunting Methods will convene an expert group in November 2011 to undertake a review and evaluate the killing data and methods for catches of small cetaceans among member and observer countries and other relevant partners, as well as to examine data and information on recent and ongoing research on improvements and technical innovations in hunting equipment.

Independent experts from worldwide have been invited to contribute to the work of this expert group, including specialists in veterinary science and hunting equipment, and hunters.

Inspection and observation of hunting

A training course for observers appointed under the NAMMCO Joint Control Scheme for the Hunting of Marine Mammals will be organised in the coming year, with the purpose of ensuring that NAMMCO observers have an updated understanding of their responsibilities and access to the latest relevant information on the regulation of whaling and sealing in member countries. The purpose NAMMCO's international observation scheme is to provide a mechanism for NAMMCO to monitor whether decisions made by the Commission are respected. NAMMCO appoints observers who oversee hunting and inspection activities in NAMMCO member countries and report their observations to NAMMCO.

US certification of Iceland

On 15 September the US Embassy in Reykjavik informed that the US government was now signing a Pelly Amendment Certification of Iceland based upon the US' assertion that fin whales in the North Atlantic are endangered. The Icelandic fin whale quota is based on scientific and management advice from NAMMCO, and the Icelandic Marine Research Institute applies an RMP-like model for estimating sustainable catches. Matters of Icelandic trade in whale products are also in accordance with international obligations.

Iceland, supported by other NAMMCO members, are of 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.

EU trade ban on seal products

NAMMCO reiterates that the ban which was adopted by the EU Council on 27 July 2009 and came into effect on 20 August 2010, 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.

Negotiations have taken place between Norway, Canada and the EU regarding the trade ban, but they did not yield a solution. Presently negotiations on the composition of a WTO Panel are under way among the three parties. Greenland is presently dealing with the consequences of the ban, including the Inuit Exemption, at the governmental and industry level.

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