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REPORT OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP ON ABUNDANCE ESTIMATES

The Working Group met at the Marine Research Institute, Reykjavik during 21-23 February 1997, under the chairmanship of Nils Olsen (Norway). The meeting was attended by members of the Working Group: Þorvaldur Gunnlaugsson (Iceland), Þor Ólafur Noyv (Greenland), Nils Olsen (Norway), Jónhann Sigurðsson (Iceland), Góli Vilmannsson (Iceland), as well as invited participants David Broxton and Louise Burt from the Mathematical Institute, University of St Andrews, UK.

1. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Working Group was established by the Scientific Committee at its fourth meeting in Sandness, Faeroe Islands in February 1996 and was given the task:

(i) 'to review the analyses and where relevant also to analyse data from NAIS-95 to ensure its comparability, both between NAIS-95 survey areas, as well as with data from other sightings surveys, in order to provide a basis for calculating abundance estimates for the relevant cetacean stocks in the North Atlantic', and

(ii) 'to monitor stock levels and trends in stocks of all major mammals in the North Atlantic'.

The Working Group coordinated its work by correspondence (led by J. Sigurðsson, Iceland until replaced by N. Olsen). The meeting in Reykjavik was the first and only meeting of the Working Group, and focused on describing synoptic distributions of the cetacean species encountered during NAIS-95, and abundance estimates for minke, fin, sei and pilot whales.

2. PLANNING THE NAIS-95 SURVEY

In 1987 and 1989 synchronized large scale cetacean sightings surveys were conducted on board vessels and aircraft allocated by the Faeroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland, Norway and Spain known as the NAIS-87 and NAIS-89 (North Atlantic Sightings Survey) surveys, respectively (see e.g. Report of the Commission 29 (1989) 293-371; Report of the Commission 41 (1991) 315-338). In addition to scientists from the sponsoring laboratories, scientists from Japan, New Zealand, UK and USA were also involved in the planning and conduct of the surveys. As a result of these joint research efforts, the first scientific view of distribution and abundance of cetaceans was obtained that covered deep and shallow areas of the northern North Atlantic Ocean from the coast of Spain in the south to the Shetlands Sea in the north, and as far west as to the coast of Iceland and West Greenland north to 58°N. The surveys were planned and the results were analysed in cooperation with members of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) Scientific Committee.