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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 (the way). The meeting was attended by members of the Working Group: Perivaldur Ólafsson (Oslo), Pjetur Þorgeirsson (Reykjavik), Pjetur Magnússon (Reykjavik), Pjetur Magnússon (Reykjavik), Gudi Vilgústsson (Reykjavik), as well as invited participants David Brothers and Louise Hart from the Marine Biological Association, University of St Andrews, UK.

**1. TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Working Group was established by the Scientific Committee at its fourth meeting in Tisbury, Faro Islands in February 1994 and was given the task:

(i) *Also review the accuracy and where relevant also to analyze data from NAAS-95 to ensure its comparability, both between NAAS-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) *Also monitor stock levels and trends in stocks of all marine 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 systematic distributions of the cetacean species encountered during NAAS-95, and abundance estimates for minke, fin, sei and pilot whales.

**2. PLANNING THE NAAS-98 SURVEY**

In 1997 and 1999 systematic large scale cetacean sightings surveys were conducted on board vessels and aircraft allocated by the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland, Norway and Spain (areas of the NAAS-87 and NAAS-89 (North Atlantic Sightings Survey) surveys, respectively (see e.g. *Rep.on Whal Comm* 30 (1999):395-432, *Report Whal Comm* 41 (1991):124-128). 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 systematic 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 Barents Sea in the north, and as far west as to the coasts of Iceland and West Greenland south to NEEN. The surveys were planned and the results were analyzed in cooperation with members of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) Scientific Committee.

In 1998 the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission (NAMMCO) Council decided that a North Atlantic sightings survey should be conducted under the auspices of the NAMMCO Scientific Committee. The Council requested the Scientific Committee to plan joint cetacean sightings surveys in the North Atlantic by coordinating national research programmes with the aim to obtain new abundance estimates of the principle whale species in the northern North Atlantic. The Committee decided that the survey was to take place during July-August 1999 and established a Working Group to plan the NAAS-95 under the chairmanship of P. Larsen (Greenland).

The Working Group had three meetings in 1994 and 1995 (NAAS-95 Working Group Report 1994a, 1994b, NAMMCO Annual Report 1995:121-124) to plan and coordinate activities in the NAMMCO member countries and to establish cooperation with scientists and laboratories in other relevant countries and organisations, particularly the IWC Scientific Committee and the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES). A joint meeting with experts from both organisations was held in December 1994, where theoretical and practical aspects of the survey were discussed in detail. The Norwegian part of the NAAS-95 survey, MLLS-95 (Norwegian Independent Line-Transsect Survey), was subject to special considerations within the IWC Scientific Committee (*Rep.on Whal Comm* 46 (1996):61-62).

At the outset it was decided that the design and planning of NAAS-95 was to be compatible with the earlier surveys in order to allow for comparison of abundance and distribution in time. During the planning phase, an increase in the area coverage to the western North Atlantic compared to earlier surveys (see Figures 1 and 2) was considered an important goal. However, efforts failed to obtain simultaneous participation by the relevant