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REPORT OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE WORKING
GROUP ON THE ROLE OF MINKE WHALES, HARP SEALS
AND HOODED SEALS IN NORTH ATLANTIC ECOSYSTEMS

1-3. OPENING PROCEDURES

At its Sixth Meeting in Tromsø, March 1996, the Council requested that the Scientific Committee:

A...focus its attention on the food consumption of these predators in the North Atlantic: the minke whale, the harp seal and the hooded seal, with a particular emphasis on the study of the potential implications for commercially important fish stocks.

As a result, the Scientific Committee decided to convene a special Working Group on the Role of Minke Whales, Harp Seals and Hooded Seals in the North Atlantic (SA, S-ME), during the 1997 Scientific Committee meeting. The Working Group was chaired by Odd V. Skjerve (Iceland) and included scientists from Canada, Denmark, Greenland, Iceland, and Norway. A list of participants is given in Appendix 1.

The Agenda for the Working Group as given in Appendix 2 was adopted. P/O Bjarne Nave (Greenland) and Larry Stevens (Canada) agreed to act as rapporteurs. A list of documents presented and references is given in Appendix 3.

4. FEEDING ECOLOGY IN THE NORTH ATLANTIC

4.1 North East Atlantic

4.1.1 Minke whale

EC/SC/97 presented current information on the energy requirements, diet composition, and stock size of minke whales (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*) in northern Atlantic waters. These were combined to estimate the consumption of various prey species by this stock.

The distribution pattern and abundance estimate were based on a survey conducted in 1995. A total of 83,000 minke whales that feed in coastal waters off northern Norway, in the Barents Sea and around Spitzbergen, were estimated to consume more than 1.8 million tons of prey biomass during the six months from mid-April to mid-October.

This biomass consumed by minke whales was composed of 402,000 tons of herring (*Clupea harengus*), 673,000 tons of herring (*Clupea harengus*), 142,000 tons of capelin (*Melanogrammus aeglefinus*), 204,000 tons of cod (*Gadus morhua*), 128,000 tons of haddock (*Melanogrammus aeglefinus*), and 33,000 tons of other fish species, including sand eel (*Ammodytes* sp.) and saithe (*Trachurus trachurus*). It was also noted that minke whale data are subject to year to year variations due to changes in the resource base in different feeding areas. Thus, relative distribution of consumption of different prey items is highly dynamic.